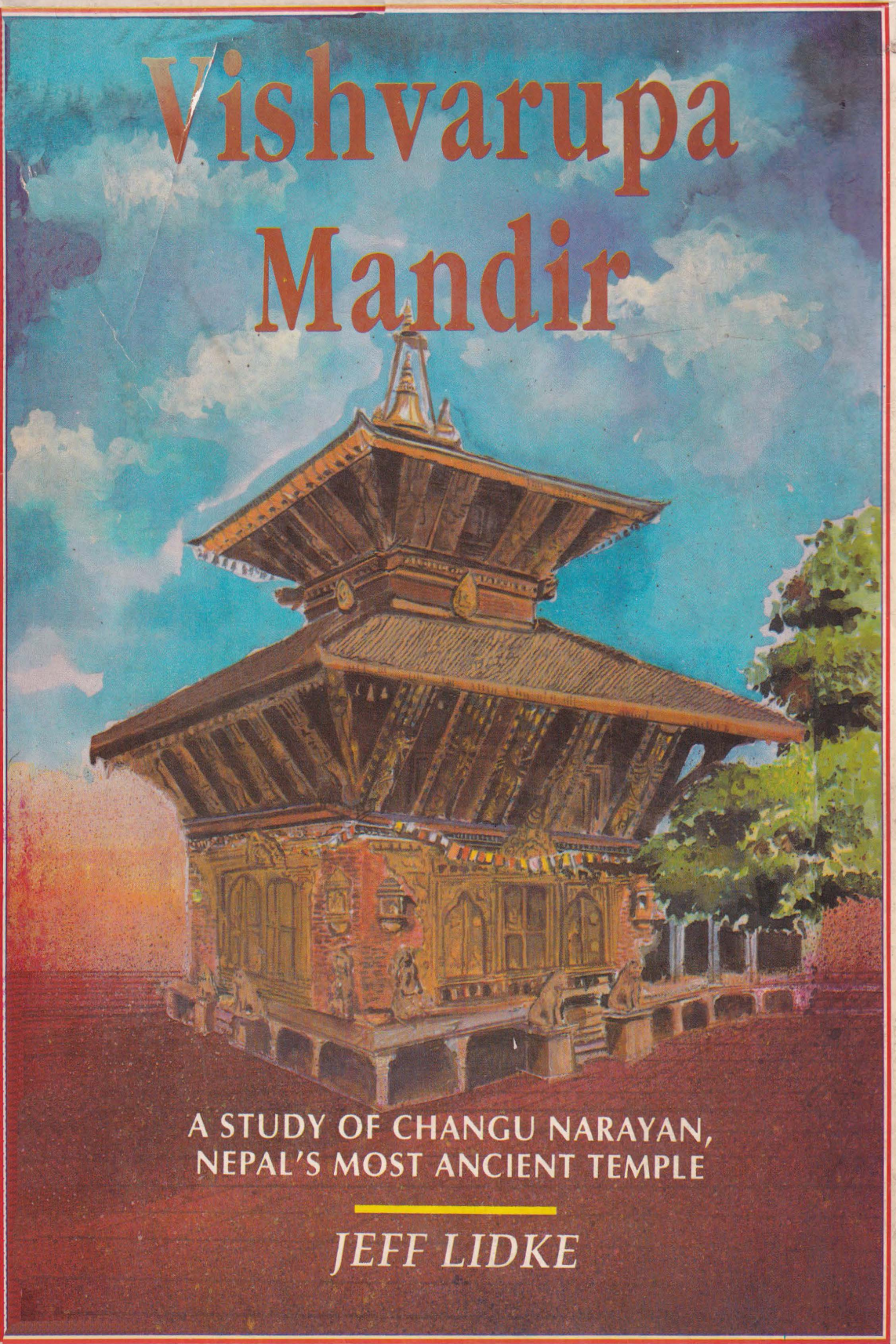
Vishvarupa Mandir



A STUDY OF CHANGU NARAYAN, NEPAL'S MOST ANCIENT TEMPLE

JEFF LIDKE

Vishvarupa Mandir

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The book is a sparkling analysis of Changu Narayan, the oldest pagoda temple of the world. Calling upon many fields and methods ranging from art-history to textual analysis, Jeff Lidke for the first time produces a comprehensive and conclusive study of Changu Narayan that shall significantly contribute to the study of the Nepalese history and understanding of Nepal's socio-religious set-up. Beginning the book with a careful analysis of the temple and ongoing pattern of worship that survives there, the author postulates the thesis that Changu Narayan is the architectural form of *Vishvarupa*, the Universal Embodiment. This symbolism is best expressed in manifold forms; it is found in the unique manifestation of Vishnu as the beheaded Narayana; in the temple's architecture and ritual expression, as well as in its sculptural forms and, ultimately, in the account of its mythic origins. Tracing the shadowy history of Nepal and Changu Narayan, Lidke examines myths and themes associated with the temple as found in ancient Nepali and Indian scriptures. Laying emphasis on the images sculpted in wood, stone and copper, especially, the central image which depicts a beheaded form of Vishnu, Jeff Lidke analyses how during the daily ritual *(nitya puja)* the central image of Narayan is ritually beheaded in a rite known as *shirosandhana* which is a symbolic act of creation. In beheading Narayan, the temple

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(Continued...)

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JEFF LIDKE

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Foreword

Nepal is a country of marvelous, rich, and varied cultures that are unique to Asia and to the world. There is no better symbol of that civilization than its temple architecture and the Kathmandu Valley is a treasure trove of Hindu and Buddhist monuments—more than 2000 in all. With two years spent there as a graduate student specializing in wooden architecture, and as I return to the Himalayas again and again, I am aware of both the problems and the rewards of working with medieval structures that have not lost their original meaning nor their original beauty. The main difficulty in approaching these subjects is that of being an outsider who strives to know the art from the inside. But the effort is worth it.

Jeff Lidke has accomplished a remarkable study in his analysis of Changu Narayan temple as a *Vishvarupa* symbol. The building is indeed one of the most significant in Nepal, and surely it is among the country's earliest surviving visualizations and settings of traditional Hindu-Buddhist worship. By spending much time there, by consulting the classical writings of South Asia and the Himalaya, and by working closely with scholars and religious authorities, Jeff Lidke has immersed himself in the past and present manifestations of Vishnu worship at this remarkable place. He attempts to define the hazy beginnings of the temple site, and he refers to ongoing patterns of respect and worship that survive there. Most important, he has conveyed what he knows and what he still seeks to learn in a solid and clear analysis that all readers can share. His study is intended for lay-persons as well as for specialists, and it makes an important contribution to the field of Himalayan studies. It is lively and readable as well as solidly rooted in fact, and it is colored by his own enthusiasm.

The international Himalayan Studies Association is perhaps the main foreign organization dedicated to opening the kingdom of Nepal to in-depth study by the world's scholarly community, and Jeff Lidke illustrates the achievements that are possible by an investigator who brings knowledge and sincerity to research in the field. His cooperation with Tribuvan University as sponsoring institution and his close work with Nepalese scholars are crucial to what he has been able to accomplish. And we hope that this study of art in life, and of art as catalyst to the understanding of entire societies, will be only

the beginning of his endeavors in the once sequestered and always fascinating land of Nepal. Can it be true that its strengths and beliefs that date from medieval times and earlier will survive and be shared even into the 21st century?

Ronald M. Bernier,
University of Colorado,
Boulder, Colorado

Preface

Hermeneutics of the Vishvarupa

The Westerner attempting to analyze Changu Narayan is confronted with obvious difficulties. This temple is the embodiment of another culture's belief system. It symbolizes an understanding in some ways familiar to the West and yet, in other ways, very distant. It is this fact that makes things difficult when we try to "understand understandings not our own."[1] This attempt at understanding is called hermeneutics. This science asks the root question: "How is it that we can or cannot understand ourselves and others?" It makes us aware that there are many difficulties in studying the "other."

In Nepal, the first obvious barrier is language. Seven months of extensive Nepali training does not enable one to penetrate past the basics of food and age. The country's native texts remain foreign. For this reason, the author had to call upon English translations where available, or rely on the capacity of my informants to translate. In this process, one comes across a deeper cultural barrier—one perhaps at the root of language differences—the difference in mind sets, in the way people perceive the world. When translating a text the informant places it within the context of his own understanding, and then conveys it to the author. In this act of conveyance two mind sets interact. What results may be an understanding different from what is written in the original text. Perhaps, if the scholarship is thorough the message remains, in essence, the same. In this regard, the author has attempted to translate meanings as carefully and accurately as possible. He has tried to formulate the Nepali mind set in Western terms. This task, however, is "one of those things like riding a bicycle that is easier done than said."[2]

This is not to understate the difficulty of the process of doing, but rather that even if one *can* comprehend the Nepali world view, the larger task is then to convey this understanding. One may sense that he understands the Nepalese pagoda. One may receive an insight into its meaning, but how is this meaning to be conveyed? The temple is a brick-thought. In it is enshrined the symbolic mind of Nepal. The key to interpretation is penetrating this mind. To begin to put the symbolic terms of the temple into Western formulations, the author found it helpful to live with and among the native people. By observing but also sharing in their relationships, one begins to

assimilate and comprehend the native mind set. In addition, this living experience must be combined with a textual study of their theological and philosophical systems.

It is of little value to examine the Nepalese pagoda and say that it resembles this or that structure within one's own culture. First, one has to attempt to understand it on its own grounds. All too often, people enter another culture and say, "I understand this belief. It's like my own." The common understanding of Hinduism is that it is a polytheism of thousands of strange gods. This theory is based on a Western notion of plurality which says that *more than one* form means an *essential difference* in forms. In Hinduism, multiplicity embodies oneness. The Sanskrit term *Vishvarupa* has been used in this book to describe the temple structure. The term means approximately "Universal Form." It embodies theological concepts different from those in the West. In some respects this book is an attempt to define this term *Vishvarupa*. An understanding of this term *as it is understood in Nepal* will deepen one's understanding of Changu Narayan.

The *Vishvarupa* incorporates innumerable forms. Yet it is a synonym of *Brahman:* the Absolute, Supreme, One Being. This term is a paradox of ontological possibilities. It acknowledges that there is multiplicity, but says that there is only One. Somehow, it suggests that both the many and the One exist together. They are not mutually exclusive.

Many analogies to the *Vishvarupa* paradox are found in everyday life. All humans have eyes and blood, but this blood is of different types, and these eyes never seem to see the same thing. Differences in perspective divide men the world over. Differences seem painfully apparent. Yet, it is clear that there is something shared by all humans. There is an obvious quality of humanness. America, the melting pot of dozens of cultures, illustrates clearly that people can communicate across cultural barriers. Then again, this nation is divided by cultural conflicts. The *Vishvarupa* symbolism acknowledges that while multiplicity does exist, a "higher" awareness is to see division *within* unity. In the *Bhagavad Gita* (XI, 5-49), Lord Krishna reveals his *Vishvarupa* from to the devotee Arjuna. Having seen the Universal Form, Arjuna understands that all realities exist within an ultimate reality. He sees that diversity is contained within unity.

Is it possible that, despite the obvious presence of cultural diversity, there is a reality in which all beings are literally one? This is the theological message

of Hinduism. It is a notion shared by many religious traditions. Perhaps this whole question comes down to a matter of choice, a matter of free will. We can choose to see differences or we can choose to see unity. We can think of ourselves as an individual within a particular country very different from other individuals and countries, or we can think of ourselves as a part of Humankind. The *Vishvarupa* symbolism suggests that we think both ways. Krishna is a particular individual, yet he is also Vishnu, the Supreme Being. Changu Narayan is a specific temple, yet is symbolic of the entire cosmos.

Maybe the understanding of the many in the one is not free will. The mind set which embodies personal choice is perhaps more Western. The Nepalese scriptures say that the vision of the *Vishvarupa* is a gift of divine grace. Arjuna sees the *Vishvarupa* only after Krishna bestows His grace (*Bhagavad Gita*, XI, 47).

Ultimately, the way we approach foreign cultures is a highly personal matter. For this reason it is important to acknowledge our biases. No matter how objective, how matter of fact, how rational and analytical we try to be, our viewpoint will be imprinted upon our interpretation. "Whatever lip-service," Michael Polyani writes, "is given to objectivity...as human beings we must inevitably see the universe from a center lying within ourselves and speak about it in terms of a human language shaped by the exigencies of human experience."[3] In writing this book, the author has been influenced by his own world view. A bias can be used in a very positive way. Bias implies "prejudice," but in the the world of the seamstress, it mean "stretch." A bias is a must if you are to make a proper hem for a garment. In hermeneutical terms, biases allow for a stretch and modification of understanding. When we are open about our beliefs they can be stretched.[4] Knowing the author's own bias, the reader can take this into account when reading the text. He/she can see where the author's understanding has influenced the interpretation.

The author's bias is that, although there are cultural barriers to understanding, there is a deep level of being human that allows for transcultural understanding. In this notion, Eliade's concept of the sacred is an inspiration. "The sacred," he writes, "is an element in the structure of consciousness and not a stage in the history of consciousness."[5] To Eliade the "sacred" suggests that essence which is shared by all humans. The sacred makes the human being *Homo Religiosus*. Yet, the sacred is also a phenomenological reality. It is discovered in the world. It is a special

presence in the world which can be perceived by humans because it is a part of us. We seek an external reality that has its core within us.

In Hindu terminology, the *Brahman* is manifest in the world, but dwells with the human being as the *Atman*. The *Brahman* is known through knowledge of the *Atman*. Humans are different, but they are also alike. The study of religion seems to bring this across as strongly as any field, if not more so. Eliade writes, "continuous reading reveals above all the *fundamental unity* of religious phenomena and at the same time the *inexhaustible newness* of their expression [Eliade's its.]."[6] This sentence could be a description of the *Vishvarupa*. It fits the Hindu conception of reality formulated in the equation *Atman=Brahman*. *Atman* is the individual soul. In each human form its expression is unique. Brahman is the absolute, all-pervasive, fundamental unity. Yet, the two are equated in this paradoxical formula.

The paradox that Brahman=Atman acknowledges individuality, yet says that all is linked to a kind of cosmic plenum (*purnam*). (Here, obviously, "our" vocabulary is being used to describe "their" world view.) The *Vishvarupa* embodies both the plenum and the individual. It is a world view which allows for analysis of details, yet *requires that they be understood as part of the whole.*

The following book on Changu Narayan employs this viewpoint. It serves as a careful analysis of the the temple. It looks at the temple's numerous sculptures, carvings, architectural ornamentation, myths of origin and theological roots, and posits that they are all a part of the whole. As a *Vishvarupa* symbol, the temple consists of these separate parts. A full understanding of the temple is grasped only when all of these elements are understood together.

In attempting to acquire this complete understanding, this book has been grounded in scripture and theological teachings. Yet, it also reflects the author's own bias. I have not only read about Changu Narayan. I have walked its grounds. Its ancient power is a source of inspiration. Although the structural symbol of another culture, this mysterious temple has conveyed personal meaning. In the following pages I have attempted, in part, to express this meaning. Yet, it is *not* my personal understanding that this book attempts to communicate, but rather the *pure* meaning of the temple. Changu Narayan, like all Nepalese pagodas, has a symbolic message that is specific to Hindu culture. It is the structural embodiment of a theology which acknowledges the

existence of a plurality of forms within one, Universal Form. This message is not easily grasped even by the Nepalese, who already understand their culture's symbolic language. Therefore, the author's function is not only to decode this symbolic language. He must use its symbols to translate the temple's message. Then, he must convey that message in western formulations.

This endeavor is daunting. However, the world view embodied in the *Vishvarupa*, itself, implies that it can be done. The *Vishvarupa* implies that human understanding and experience are not limited to cultural differences. There is, this symbol says, a conjoining reality in which all differences, all cultures, all peoples are contained as a whole. Although this wholeness contains all cultures, its essence is non-cultural. It is this very quality which makes Changu Narayan accessible to interpretation and the endeavor attempted in this book possible.

If I am accurate in claiming that Changu Narayan is a *Vishvarupa*, then it is because this ancient temple speaks in a symbolic language which transcends culture. Built by *Homo Religiosus*, this temple stems from all humans and speaks to all humans. It conveys both a deeply personal and universal message to each person who cares to listen to its sculpted words. Throughout the following pages may the reader be inspired by the beauty and wisdom of the Vishvarupa Mandir—the temple of the Universal Form.

NOTES

1 Geertz, Clifford. *Local Knowledge.* Basic Books, New York, 1983. p. 5.

2 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

3 Polyani, Michael. *Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962, p. 3.

4 See Catherine Albanese's discussion of bias in "The Problem of Bias: Interpretive Strategies in Religious Studies." *Soundings.* Summer/Fall, 1988. v. LXXI, nos. 2-3. pp. 279-293.

5 Eliade, Mircea. *History of Religious Ideas.* V. I. The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1978, p. xiii.

6 *Ibid.*, p. xv.

Acknowledgements

This book began during a year studying and living in Nepal. The year was one of the most meaningful of my life—scholastically as well as personally. Mukunda Raj Aryal, Professor of Asian Studies at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, was the source of inspiration for this book. He presented the idea and guided me throughout. His vast knowledge of Changu Narayan and the religion of Nepal has made this work possible. He was not only a superb teacher, but a dear friend as well. I also want to thank my Religious Studies advisor, Professor Robert Lester, for his help not only on this book, but throughout my years at the University of Colorado, Boulder. His expertise and love of the field has greatly enriched my studies.

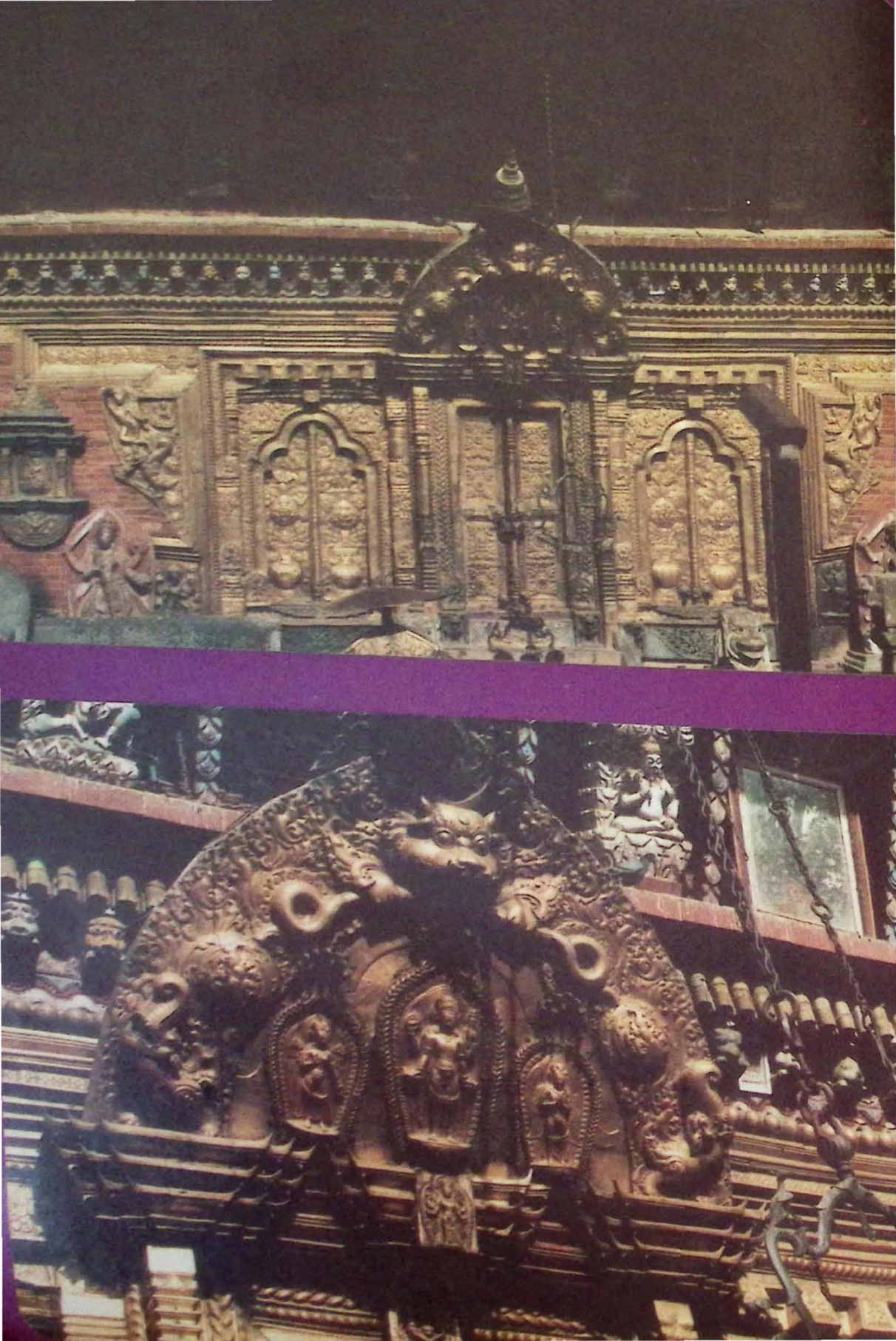
In addition I thank all of the members of the Religious Studies faculty in Boulder for their guidance throughout the years. Gratitude is also extended to Ronald Bernier, Professor of Fine Arts at CU, Boudler, for his support during the writing of this book.

Special gratitude to my family—Don, Liza, Michael, Sara, Dani, George, Maxine, Ann, Tichy, Barbara, Roger, Naren, Lorna—who supported my pilgrimage to the other side of the world; and to my invaluable and beloved editors, Lorna, Mark and Annie, who weathered Colorado blizzards to help me piece this book together. I express deep gratitude to Gregory Youngs whose computer expertise, editing, typesetting, publishing skills and enthusiasm helped bring this work to a conclusion.

Finally, I thank Megan who has been a constant support for many years now. She, like the rest of my family, has contributed much time towards this project. In addition to editing, she is responsible for several of the illustrations in the text, as well as the organization. To all of my friends, family members and teachers, a thousand namaskars.

"I see You everywhere, infinite in form,...;
not the end, nor the middle, nor yet the beginning
of You do I see, O Lord of all,
whose form is the universe."
—Bhagavad Gita (XI, 16)

This book is offered to Gurumayi Chidvilasananda,
who reveals the mystery and beauty of the Vishvarupa
in each one's heart.



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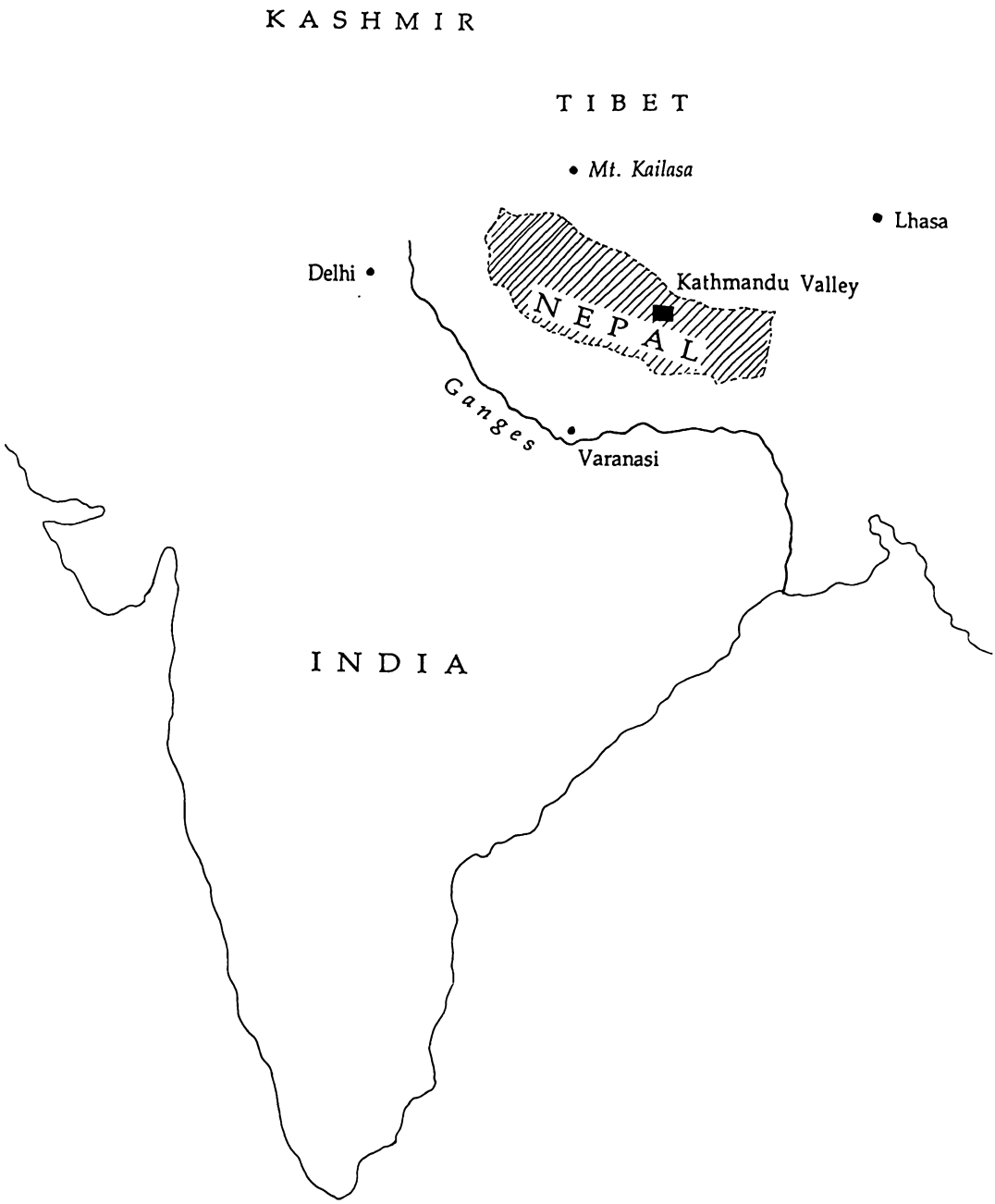
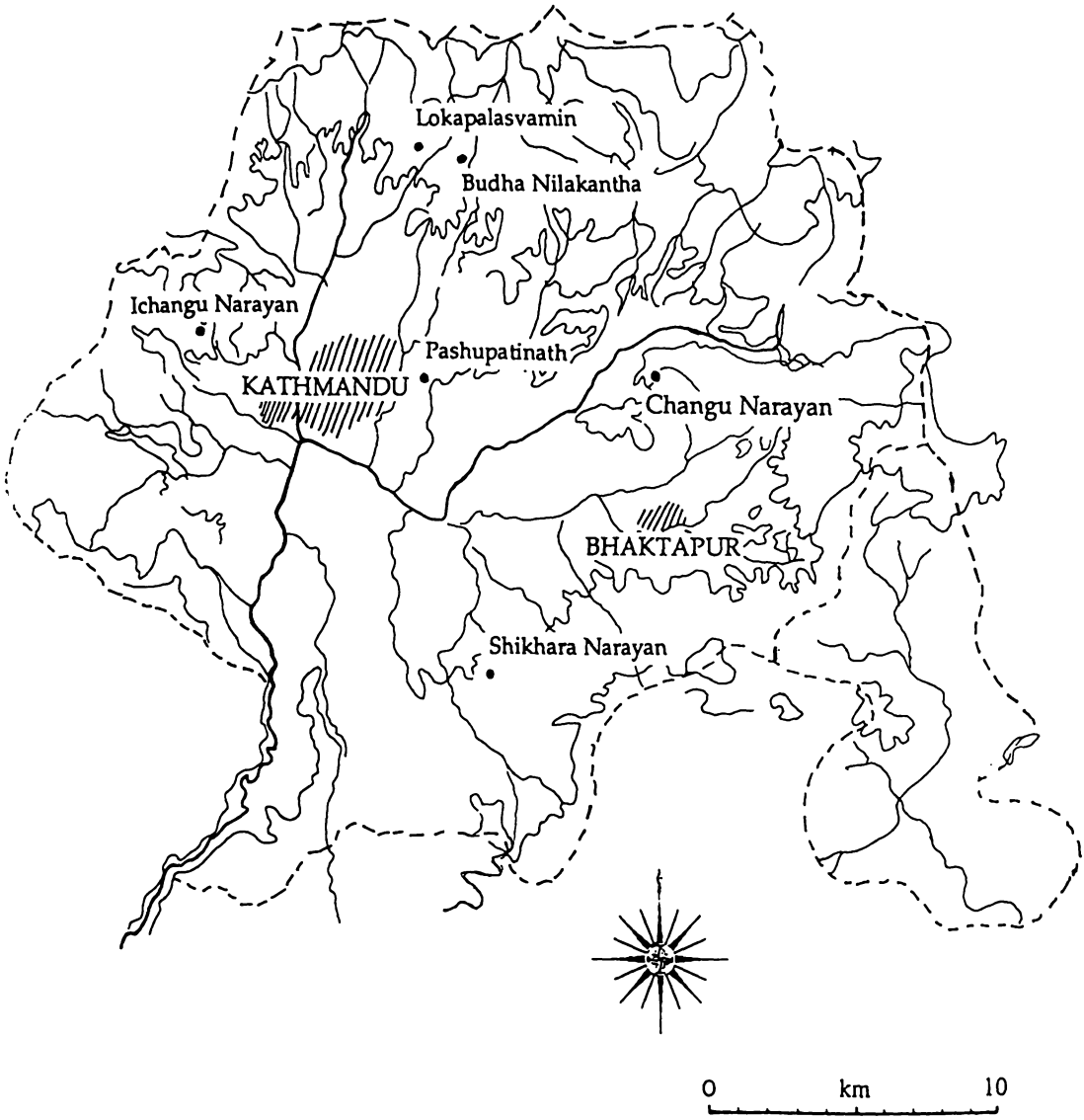


Nepal and Neighboring Countries



Map of the Kathmandu Valley; showing the four Narayana temples built by Haridattavarma and other sacred sites.

Shrines and Images

1. Garudasana (Changu) Narayana [1st century?]
2. Garudasana Narayana [7th century]
3. Krishna
4. Shri Dhara *vyuha*
5. Nriteshvar
6. Madhava *vyuha* [Vishnu Mandap]
7. Maha Vishnu [5-headed Vaikuntha]
8. Mahadev [*shiva linga*]

9a. Avalokiteshvara

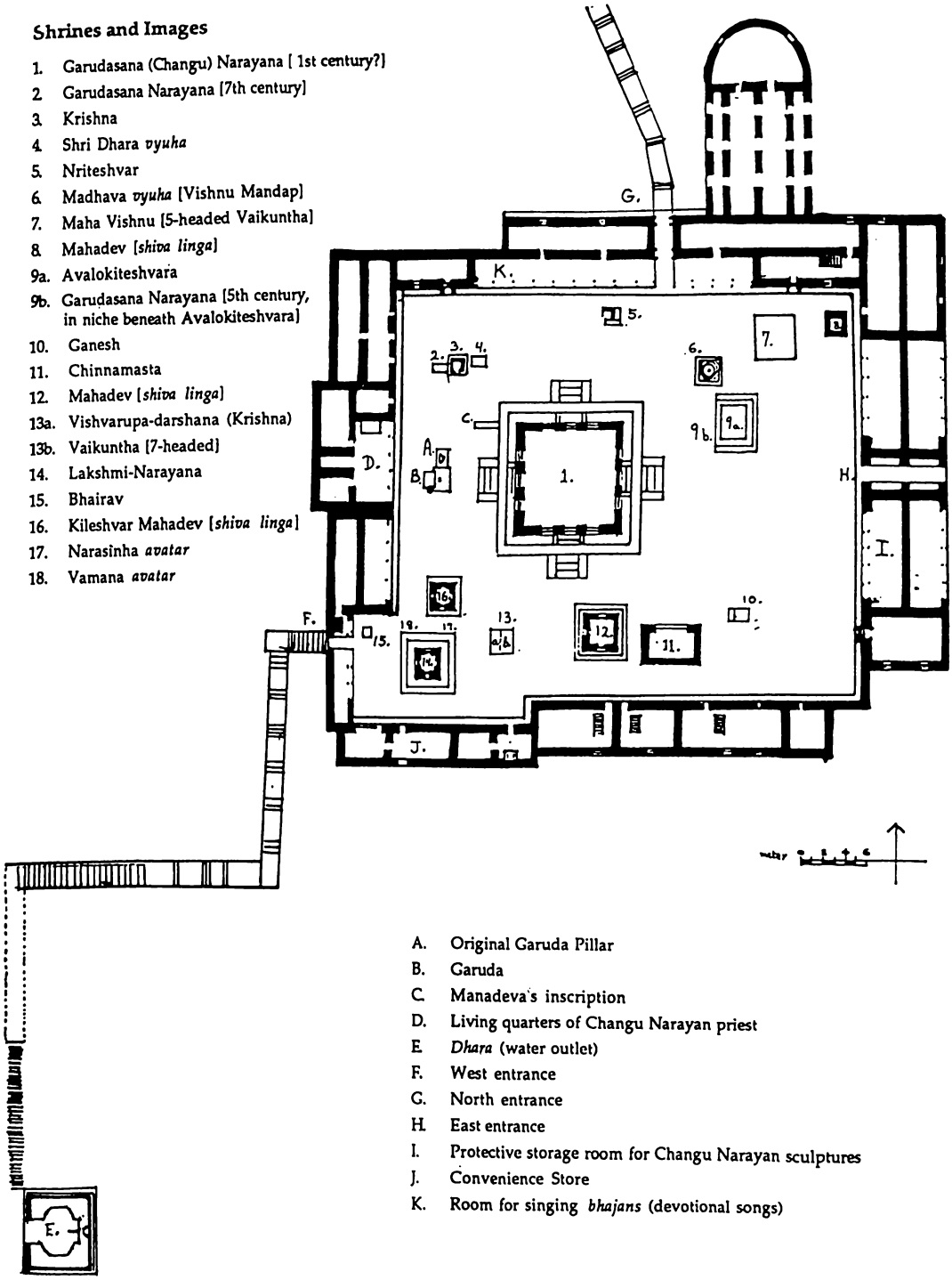
9b. Garudasana Narayana [5th century, in niche beneath Avalokiteshvara]

10. Ganesh
11. Chinnamasta
12. Mahadev [*shiva linga*]

13a. Vishvarupa-darshana (Krishna)

13b. Vaikuntha [7-headed]

14. Lakshmi-Narayana
15. Bhairav
16. Kileshvar Mahadev [*shiva linga*]
17. Narasinha *avatar*
18. Vamana *avatar*



A. Original Garuda Pillar
B. Garuda
C. Manadeva's inscription
D. Living quarters of Changu Narayan priest
E. *Dhara* (water outlet)
F. West entrance
G. North entrance
H. East entrance
I. Protective storage room for Changu Narayan sculptures
J. Convenience Store
K. Room for singing *bhajans* (devotional songs)

Changu Narayan complex

Introduction

The Setting

Atop Doladri Hill, six kilometers outside Bhaktapur (the city of devotees) stands Changu Narayan, temple of the beheaded Lord. From Bhaktapur it is a short but steep pilgrimage to the gateway of the temple. Towering brick walls surround the inner courtyard, making clear the boundaries of this sacred realm.[1] Passing through the entrance-way, one encounters an amazing sight. In the center of the complex arises an awesome two-storey pagoda of such beauty and ornamentation that it stops the breath. Engraved in this temple's struts, doors, walls and windows are over a hundred deities and religious icons, producing an almost overwhelming affect. This is Nepal's most ancient temple; its age and beauty combine in an aesthetic experience that people's of all lands can appreciate. Within its doors is the deity Changu Narayana,[2] a headless form of Vishnu found nowhere else in the world. This is a deity who, though His roots are in Indian Vaishnavism, is a very unique and special expression of Nepalese religion. Enshrined within the central chamber (*garbha-griha*), Changu Narayana is the architectural and spiritual heart of this enormous temple site. His symbolism is the key to understanding this foreign edifice.

Having stopped to digest this towering central shrine whose pinnacle extends some thirty feet into the blue sky, the eyes begin to scan the periphery. This is an historic wonderland. The stone laid courtyard is studded with sculptures and inscriptions dating back to the fifth century A. D. There are over twenty stone sculptures of the gods Krishna, Avalokiteshvara, Vaikuntha, Narasinha, Bhairava, Vamana, and Narayana; eight encircling shrines to the deities Chinnamasta, Krishna, Lakshmi-Narayana, Shiva,[3] and Ganesha.

In this site the Nepalese tradition is alive. In the transcultural language of artistic beauty it speaks to you from every image and every shrine. Here the world of the gods comes crashing into the human sphere. The medium is sculpted form. Through architectural and sculptural forms the Nepalese artists have created a structure which sends the mind soaring upwards into metaphysical thought. Changu Narayan has endured nearly two-thousand years of earthquakes, fires and cultural change. Its outer structure has been levelled numerous times, yet each time it has been rebuilt. Here, expressed in

a unique and ancient architectural form, is the enduring spirit of Nepalese religion. The power of this monument is an inspiration not just to the Nepalese, but to all peoples. In 1928 the journeyman Perceval Landon, after travelling through nearly all of Asia, recorded these thoughts:

> One remembers all the wealth of carving of the rest of the Valley; one remembers the woodwork of Peking, the Queen's golden monastery in Mandalay, and the temples at Nara and Horiuji in Japan. But when all is recalled it is probably to the shrine of Changu Narayan that one offers the palm. Perhaps one drives back home from [the city of] Bhaktapur more full of thought than from any other expedition to the many outlying places of the crowded centre of holiness and history and art.[4]

This "crowded centre of holiness" is the Kathmandu Valley. This lush and beautiful region, enclosed by mountains, is the geographical and cultural heart of Nepal, and the Hindu kingdom which is the extended setting of Changu Narayan. Within the limited expanse of the Valley walls, there are over two-thousand Hindu and Buddhist temples. It was after viewing nearly all of these temples that Landon wrote the above words of praise to Changu Narayan.

In a simple sense, this book is my attempt to elaborate on Landon's remarks. My aim is to provide a thorough analysis of Changu Narayan's history, art and "holiness," so that the reader, as Landon did, might walk away from their exploration of Changu Narayan "full of thought."

Sources

This study began during my junior year in college, which I spent living in and studying the culture of Nepal. It is the fruit of my first on-site field study, and many months spent in Kathmandu and Boulder reading, writing and editing the text. During this time I have consulted a number of sources. With the exception of Mohan Khanal's *Changu Narayana Aitasika Samragi [The Historical Documents of Changu Narayan]* written in Nepali, there is no single study devoted solely to Changu Narayan. Although this temple has received two or three pages of attention in many books devoted either to history, architecture, sculpture or religion, no book has combined all of these approaches into a single analysis. This book is the first to do so. For this reason an ensemble approach is demanded. A variety of texts from a variety of fields, ranging from art-history to iconography, from historical chronicles to ancient scriptures and manuals of architectural design have been utilized.

My primary text is the temple itself. Unlike many Nepalese temples, Changu Narayan's grounds can be entered and carefully observed by non-Hindus. Only entrance into the inner chamber (*garbha griha*) is forbidden. The temple offers a treasure trove of historical information. Its grounds are the site of the oldest known Nepalese temple and it contains a wealth of inscriptions ranging from the 5th century A.D. to the present. For this reason the temple site itself is a rich source for an interpretation of not only the temple, but of the history and culture of Nepal.

I have called upon several Nepali and Sanskrit texts. Several English translations of the *Shilpa-shastras,* the ancient scriptural treatises on architectural design, serve as a notable written text. My primary historical texts are the Nepalese chronicles known as *vamshavalis.* Ancient stories in the *Mahabharata* and the Puranas, most notably the *Nepal-mahatmya* (a local Purana), serve to further illumine Nepal's past. The *Satapatha-Brahmana* has been a crucial source for tracing the mythology of the beheaded Vishnu. Translations of the Vedas (esp. *Rig-Veda,* X, 90), Upanishads (esp. *Svetashvatra-, Katha- and Maha-Narayana-Upanishads)* and *Bhagavad Gita* have served to illumine the theology of Vaishnavism. Mohan Khanal's extensive Nepali work, *Changu Narayana Aitasika Samrgi,* was a valuable historical source.

The hermeneutical work by scholars before me has been fairly extensive on the study of Hindu temples in general. Most noteworthy is Stella Kramrisch's classic work the *Hindu Temple.* George Michell's smaller work under the same title is also a valuable resource for interpreting the basic themes and motifs of the Hindu temple. Ronald Bernier's two books, *Temples of Nepal* and *The Nepalese Pagoda,* are unique in their thorough examination of the Nepalese style. Percy Brown's book entitled *Indian Architecture* devotes a rather brief, but useful, section to Nepalese architecture. Mary Slusser's *Nepal Mandala* has a useful section on Changu Narayan, but serves only as an introduction.

Interpretation of Hindu iconography has been extensive. Gopinath Rao's three volume work *The Elements of Hindu Iconography* was particularly helpful to my study; as was the work by Pratyapaditya Pal, *Vaishnava Iconography in Nepal.* T. S. Maxwell's *Vishvarupa* had significant bearing for this book. His analysis of the sculptural forms of *Vishvarupa* (Universal Form) images in Northern India gives insight to the temple's motifs. I refer the reader to my bibliography for a look at other works deserving credit. The temple is a complex and richly symbolic structure. An accurate and thorough

interpretation necessitates the work of historians, art historians, iconologists, scholars of religions and informants.

I had the extreme good fortune of working with Mukunda Raj Aryal, Professor of Asian Culture at Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu. Professor Aryal's many years of studying Nepalese religions and culture has been focused on the Changu Narayan complex. To him, Changu Narayan is the historical and religious center of the Valley.

"What is in the Valley," he once noted, "is also at this temple. Yet, all that is at this great temple is not found in the Valley."

Layout and Methodology

This book blends two hermeneutical methods. The first is an historical approach, and the second is an interpretation of symbolic meanings. For the former, I have called upon three sources—scripture, the evidence found in inscriptions (mostly at the Changu Narayan complex), and Nepal's ancient chronicles, the *vamshavalis*. Mukunda Aryal was of great assistance in translating several inscriptions into English. While the core of this historical analysis is found in Chapters I and II, the implications are further discussed throughout most of the text. Chapter I, "Origin and Development of Vaishnavism", provides a brief, historical context in which to trace the roots of the Narayana deity. It shows us that Changu Narayana is closely related to three Indian deities—Vishnu, Purusha-Narayana, and Vasudeva-Krishna—while also being unique to Nepal.

Chapter II, "Krishna Comes to the Valley", attempts to rewrite Nepal's shadowy pre-history. It concludes that the Indian Licchavi dynasty began its rule in Nepal about four-hundred years earlier than the accepted date of 96 B.C. This relates to the Changu Narayan temple in two very important ways. First, the Licchavis were followers of the Indian Vaishnava tradition. Vaishnavism is the religious tradition of which Changu Narayan is an architectural expression. Placing Licchavi entry at an earlier date suggests that this religion is much older than has been previously assumed. Further, it pushes back the construction date of the temple itself. A careful analysis leads to the very likely possibility that Changu Narayan was built as early as the first century A. D. If this is indeed the case, then Changu Narayan is the oldest pagoda temple in the world.

Chapter III, "Mythic Origins of Changu Narayan", is the transition point of the text. Here the movement turns from a western historical approach to an

examination of the myths and themes associated with the temple as they are found in ancient Nepali and Indian scriptures. This chapter begins to explore the temple in the terms of the second hermeneutical method—not simply as an historical edifice, but as a symbolic one. Included in this section, under "Nepalese syncretism and the Buddhist Myth," is a comparison with other sculptural and artistic forms found in the Valley. What becomes evident is that this is a place of a rare tolerance and syncretism of the Buddhist and Hindu traditions found nowhere else in the world. This syncretism is strongly present at Changu Narayan and for this reason an overview of examples found in the Valley serves as preparation for a full analysis of Changu Narayan. It is shown in this chapter that the Buddhist and Hindu traditions share one vital philosophical conception: the belief of an absolute form or essence from which all other forms arise and in which all forms are sustained. In Buddhism this supreme form is known as *Anatta, Shunya,* and *Dharma-kaya.* In Hinduism the names are *Brahman, Bhagavan,* and *Vishvarupa. Vishvarupa* is the term used most powerfully in describing the temple complex. This word means Universal Form.

Chapter IV, "Vishvarupa Mandir", explores the *Vishvarupa* motif as it is expressed in architectural form. The *mandala,* Supreme Person (Purusha), Tree-Axis, and Cosmic Mountain (Mt. Meru) are all archetypes of the temple plan.. Each embodies the message of the *Vishvarupa.* Each symbolizes not only the *axis mundi* of the cosmos, but the cosmos itself. Amazingly, each of these forms is clearly symbolized in the temple structure as if to show that there are universal forms within universal forms. Technically, the temple ground plan is the *Vastu-purusha mandala.* Yet, in the eyes of the devotee, the outer form is the divine body of Narayana. The base is his feet. From here his body rises upwards to the temple pinnacle which is the God's crown. Most prominently, the temple replicates the Tree-Axis. Its central root extends from the innermost chamber (*garbha griha*) up to the pinnacle and beyond. Symbolic of the Tree's branches, the temple's wooden struts extend outward from the central axis. On these struts are carved the many forms which Narayana, the Supreme Being, assumes during the cosmogonic act.

Chapter V, "Sculptural Art: Multiple forms of the One", is devoted to analyzing the many images sculpted in wood, stone and copper. Each image is dated and, in most cases, photographed. Further, its mythic origins are recounted. In this chapter it is shown that, through a complex theological

system known as the *Pancharatra-Agama*, the sculpted forms illustrate the theme of the *Vishvarupa*, or Universal Form. Perhaps the most interesting of the twenty stone sculptures is the central image. This image depicts a beheaded form of Vishnu found nowhere else in the world. Mythic accounts of this form reveal the theme of sacrifice. It is through the sacrifice of the Purusha, the Cosmic Man, that the *Vishvarupa* comes into being (*Satapatha-Brahmana* XIII, I).

Chapter VI, "Temple Worship: Bringing the Vishvarupa to Life", continues with an analysis of the beheaded symbolism. During the daily ritual (*nitya puja*) the central image of Narayana is ritually beheaded. This highly significant and rare rite, known as the *shiro-sandhana*, is symbolic of the act of creation. In beheading Narayan, the temple priest gives symbolic birth to the god's *Vishvarupa*. Also discussed in this chapter are the annual festivals and special days of ritual which are acknowledged at the temple.

Following the conclusion there are three appendices. The first is a translation of several Changu Narayan inscriptions from each of Nepal's dynastic eras. The second appendix records the authors interviews with the priests and devotees at the temple. The final appendix discusses a garden near the temple where over twenty, sixteenth century images are found. Throughout the text there are over forty plates and illustrations. Most of these are the author's photos, shot during many visits to the temple.

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This book is unique for several reasons. It is the first conclusive study of Changu Narayan. Its approach calls upon many fields and methods ranging from art-history to textual analysis. In doing so it is properly placed within the field of Religious Studies. In cultures such as Nepal, religion extends to all areas of life. An ensemble approach is demanded for a thorough and accurate interpretation. In taking such an approach, my final analysis offers two important conclusions. The first is that the antiquity of Changu Narayan has important implications for both the history of Nepal and the origin of the pagoda temple style. The second is a new approach to the temple structure. I posit that Changu Narayan is best understood as a *Vishvarupa*, or Universal Embodiment. This symbolism is expressed in manifold forms: it is found in the unique manifestation of Vishnu as the beheaded Narayana; in the temple's architecture and ritual expression, as well as in its sculptural forms; and, ultimately, in the accounts of its mythic origins.

While discussing Changu Narayan's important historical implications I have attempted to show that this ancient structure is the Vishvarupa Mandir (the temple of the Universal Form). These two approaches, I hope, will make a significant contribution to both the writing of Nepalese history, and the understanding of Nepalese temples.

NOTES

1 In centuries past, when Nepal was divided by warring families, these walls served to make Changu Narayan not only a site of worship, but of defense.

2 * For clarity, when referring to the temple complex I will use the shortened Nepali form, "Changu Narayan." When referring to the central deity after which the temple is named, I will use the proper Sanskrit form and add an "a" to the end of Narayan making "Changu Naraya*na*."

3 There are four shrines to Shiva, including the Nriteshvar, Mahadev (2) and Kileshvar Mahadev shrines.

4 Landon, Perceval. *Nepal.* Ratna Pustak Bhandar: Kathmandu, Nepal; 1987.

Chapter One

Origin and Development of Vaishnavism

The various aspects of the Changu Narayana deity have their origin in Vaishnavism, a devotional religion which recognizes the god Vishnu as the Supreme Being. Vaishnavism is the culmination and synthesis of the iconography, mythology and teachings centered around three ancient, Indian Hindu deities—Vishnu, Purusha-Narayana, and Vasudeva-Krishna, which, being similar in nature, were over a period of a thousand years combined in a single doctrine. It was, a Nepalese myth tells us, through Vasudeva-Krishna that Vaishnavism was brought to Nepal. It was from Purusha-Narayana that Changu Narayana derived his name, and it was from his identity as Vishnu that he is believed to pervade the universe. To understand these three deities as they are expressed in Changu Narayana we will begin with a brief historical perspective of each god tracing their separate origins to the point of merger, about 2500 years ago when they were recognized as but different names of the Sole God.

Aditya Vishnu: This deity first emerged in the early ages of the *Rig-Veda* (1500 B. C.). Here he was far from his eventual status as the Father, Mother, and Eternal Preceptor of the Universe later ascribed to him in the Epic age *(Pita mata cha sarvasya Jagatah shashvato guruh)*,[1] for Vishnu was first conceived amidst a pantheon of three-thousand gods. Along with eleven other deities, the *adityas*, Vishnu was identified with the daily rhythms of the sun as "the lord of unceasing activity." (The root *vish* means "to be active.")[2]

Although Vishnu here seems but one simple aspect in the play of life, his importance cannot be overlooked. While the Rigvedic hymns to him are few, these few contain the seeds of his destined rise to the One. In these ancient texts Vishnu is often described as covering the whole universe in three strides. Such symbolism, scholars say, arises from the watching of the sun as it makes its "three steps" at dawn, mid-day, and dusk.[3] Yet, the meaning is deeper than this, as the following hymn shows:

> Three of these worlds Vishnu strode; thrice did he plant his foot. The whole of the universe was gathered in the dust of his footsteps.

> Vishnu, the guardian of all, he whom none can deceive, made three strides and thenceforth established the *dharma*,[4]
> As eyes behold the all-encompassing sky, so do the wise ones see the supreme state of Vishnu.
> The ever prayerful and awakened wise realize that supreme state of Vishnu.[5]

The structure of the universe, according to the Veda, consists of three realms—the earth, the celestial, and the sky. Vishnu's three strides, encompassing each of these regions, suggests a divinity of great power and omnipresence. How long could such a god, capable of pervading the cosmos, remain as but one of many deities? As another translation of the word *Vishnu* tells us, this ancient deity is, by nature, "immanent, all-pervasive."[6]

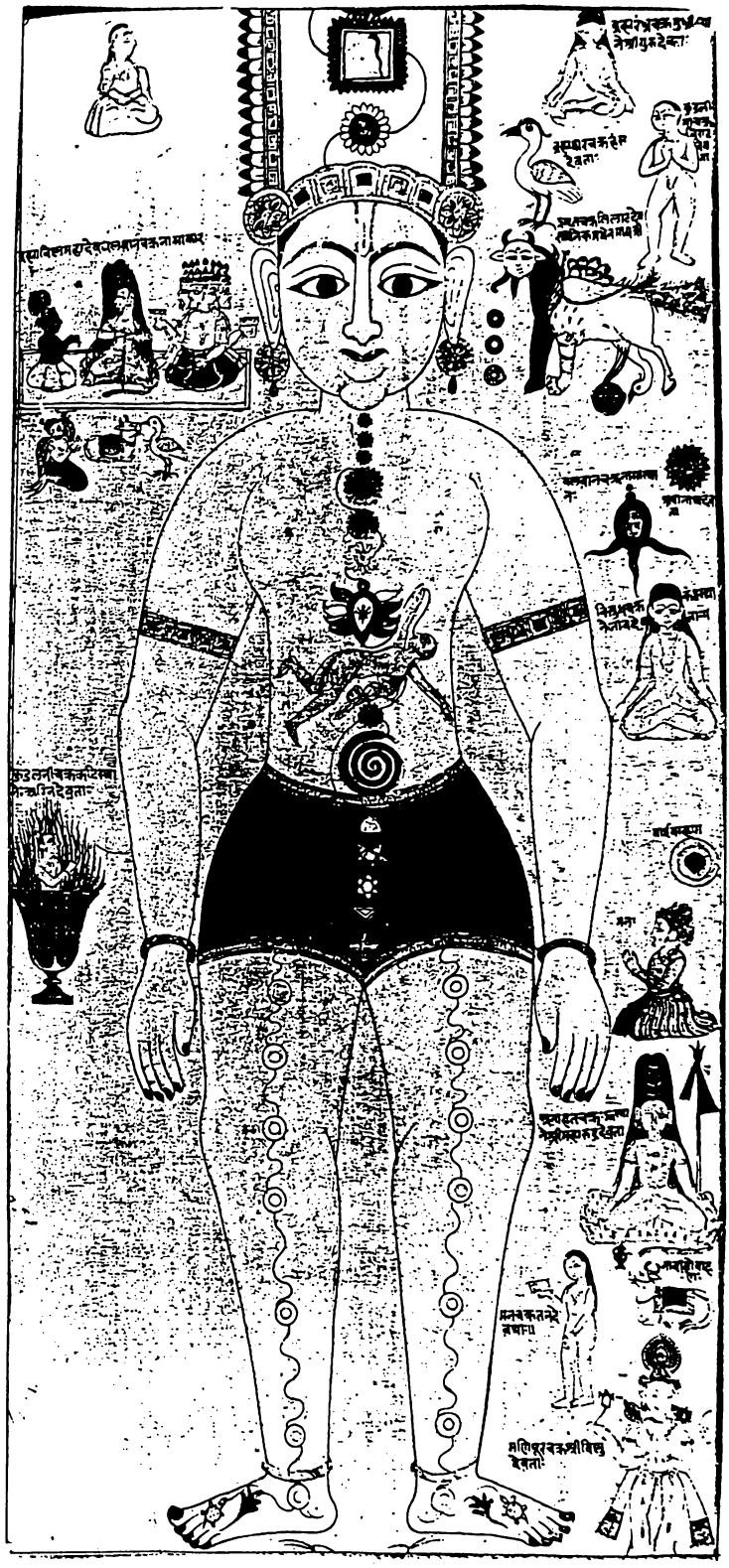
In other Rigvedic passages he is called *ritasya garbham* (I, 156, 3)—the germ of the sacrifice.[7] He is also seen as a leader in battle, especially in his association with the god Indra, the two being called masters of the world (VI, 69, 99). More importantly, Vishnu is honored as a god of bliss whose footprints are full of sweetness and ceaseless joy, and whose highest step, the heavenly abode of Vaikuntha, is the goal of devoted worshipers. The *Rig Veda* reads.

> May I attain to that, his (Vishnu's) dear place (Vaikuntha) where men devoted to the gods are exulting; for that verily is akin to the wide-stepper, in the highest step of Vishnu a well of sweetness.[8]

This "highest place," known only to Vishnu (I. 155, 5), became an important image in his rise to eminence. Yet, in the early Vedic times he was not yet seen as the One God, nor even as the highest god. Even in those hymns of his own praise Vishnu was given the subordinate title as the "worthy friend of Indra."[9] It would be a few hundred years before the Vedic declaration that, "The great divinity of the gods is One,"[10] would be fully realized in Vishnu.

Purusha-Narayana: Paralleling these ancient hymns to Vishnu were those to the deity Purusha, "the cosmic man," whose imagery would play a crucial part in the development of the Vaishnava deity. In the "Purusha-sukta" (*Rig-Veda* X. 90) the sage declares that.

> Thousand-headed was the Purusha, thousand-eyed, thousand-footed. He embraced the earth on all sides...
> The Purusha is this all, that which was and which shall be. He is Lord of immortality, which he grows beyond through (sacrificial) food.
> Such is his greatness, and still greater than that is the Purusha. One fourth of him is all beings. The three fourths of him is immortal in Heaven."[11]



Cosmic Man
(Purusha - Narayan) :
Rajasthan, 17th century

The hymn goes on to say that Purusha, through an act of sacrificial dismemberment by the gods (who are presumably extensions of his own being), becomes the universe. His eye becomes the sun, his breath the wind, his spirit the moon, his head the heavens, and his feet the earth (X, 90, 13-14). From his mouth arises the *brahmin* (priest) caste, from his arms the *kshatriya* (warrior), from his thighs the *vaishya* (merchant), and from his feet the *shudra* or servile class (X, 90, 12). In this way, the entire cosmos arises from the primal man, he who is the source of all. The sacrifice completed, the Purusha arises to the heavens, becoming that which is both within and beyond the created realms. (X, 90, 16)

In the *Satapatha-brahmana* (1000 B. C.) the "Purusha-sukta" is further elaborated. Here we find first mention (XIII, 6, I, I) of Narayana who is said to be a great *rishi* (sage) and the inspired author of the of the "Purusha-sukta."[12] The author of this *Brahmana* tells us that Purusha desired: "Would that I surpassed all beings! Would that I alone were this All."[13] Thereafter, for five nights (*pancharatram*) he performed the *Purusha-medha*, a sacrificial rite by which he became the Totality. In several of the *Brahmana* passages Narayana is equated with Purusha (XIII, 6, 1), suggesting that he is more than an illumined sage. "This," writes Bhandarkar, "shadows forth the rising of Narayana to the dignity of the Supreme Soul who pervades all and in whom all things exist."[14]

This shadow was first starting to cast with the writing of the Rigvedic hymn (X. 82, 5) which asks:

> Prior to the sky, prior to this earth, prior to the living gods, what is that embryo which the waters held first and in which all the gods existed? The water held that same embryo in which all gods exist or find themselves; on the navel of the unborn stood something in which all beings stood.[15]

Throughout the Brahmanic age, several times the answer was given that it was Purusha, the Primal Being (also called Brahma, Prajapati, and Vishvakarman), who was the resting place of all. Yet, the final answer was not to come until a thousand years after the question was first set forth. The world's longest epic poem, the *Mahabharata* tells us that:

> the waters were called *Naras* [men] because they were the sons of *Nara* [man], and since they were the first resting place of Purusha he came to be known as *Narayana* [he in whom men abide].[16]

Thus, by around 400 B. C., some six hundred years after his first mention as a poet-sage, Narayana had arisen to the status of the Absolute. Yet, he had not arisen alone, for Vishnu, the "All-Pervader," whose three steps encompass the Totality, was also being praised as the One.

"Vishnu is the most excellent of gods," the *Satapatha-Brahmana* (VI, 6, 1, 2) declared some five-hundred years after the god's first mention in the *Rig-Veda*.[17] In the *Aitareya-Brahmana* (I, 1) Vishnu is said to occupy the highest place amongst the gods.[18] Moving to the end of the Upanishadic age (500 B. C.) the *Maha-Narayana-Upanishad* offers the first clear description of Vishnu as the supreme,

> The Parameshvara, the primal cause who abides here and who has no cause of its own will, is the most exalted knower of Brahman (the absolute)—he is Vishnu. He is one, even as the ether of the pots and pans is one only, of the vast expanse of ether."[19]

This Upanishad goes on to praise Vishnu, Narayana, and Purusha as the One God who is known by many names (st. 201-269). Naturally, these three deities, each being revered as the Sole God, would eventually be accepted as the same One.

Having traced the connection between Vishnu and Purusha-Narayan to its merging point, having come to the dawn of the Epic age in which the Vaishnava cult would become a full bloomed tradition, we must step back a little to incorporate the third and perhaps most crucial element in the early development of the Vaishnava tradition—Vasudeva-Krishna.

Vasudeva-Krishna: The Vedic hymns to Vishnu and Purusha sing praises to a divinity in human form. We can only speculate how the people interpreted these images. Was that ultimate ground of being, that primal source of all, really the Purusha, the cosmic man? Or were these hymns just metaphors used to describe something completely beyond the realm of humanness? By the time of the Upanishads (800-500 B. C.) there were many who found the latter to be true. They defined the supreme as *Brahman*, the formless (*nirguna*), beingless (*asat*) substratum of all. The *Brahman* was described negatively as *neti, neti* ("not this, not this") as It could not be known in the external world by means of the senses. As the essence of all, the *Brahman* was declared to be the innermost self of man, the *Atman*, knowable through the attainment of *jnana*, or knowledge, which arises from the practice of meditation and scriptural study.

There were, however, those who would bring the anthropomorphic Vedic images to their highest possible outcome by establishing a monotheistic tradition. In the *Shvetashvatara-Upanishad* (I, 2) the sage answers positively the question, "Is perhaps the Purusha to be considered the ultimate cause?": "I know this great Primeval Person, by whom this All is filled, who is a mighty universal ruler, who is omnipresent."[20] This Primal Person, at times called Ishvara (the Lord), is also discussed in relation to the microcosm: it is He who dwells in the hearts of all beings as their *Atman* (III, 2; VI, 2). His nature serves a three-fold function: He has created all beings, He is now protecting and sustaining them, and at the end of time He will absorb the cosmos into Himself (III, 2). Because of His greatness the Upanishadic author writes of the Lord in this way,

> Him who is the Supreme Lord of lords, and who is the supreme deity of deities and the supreme master of masters, transcendent, him let us know as God, the lord of the world, the adorable (Bhagavat).[21]

Such was the religious climate into which Krishna-Vasudeva was born. While traditional myth claims that Krishna was born many thousands of years ago, his name is not mentioned in the early texts of the Veda. This reference does not come until the *Chandogya-Upanishad* which mentions Krishna as a disciple of Ghora Angirasa, a priest of the sun. In this text Krishna learns devotional practices to the god Bhagavat (a later synonym of Vishnu meaning "the adorable").[22] In the *Mahabharata,* Krishna plays a major role in the dramatic war which unfolds between the Pandavas and their cousins the Kauravas—a war which historians believe was fought in northern India around the eleventh century B.C. From these references it is generally accepted that Krishna was an historical figure. As such he seems to have been a man of such spiritual power that people saw in him the divine made manifest. Knowing of the ancient hymns which praised the divine in human form, Krishna's followers were to see these images as literal truth, believing that the Primal Man had become incarnate on earth. Shortly after his death, if not during his life itself, Krishna was raised entirely above the status of a human being. By the time of the *Mahabharata,* he was none other than Narayana, the eternal resting place of all. "Oh invincible one," Krishna says in the *Mahabharata* to his disciple Arjuna, "...I am Hari-Narayana" ("Vanaparvan," XII. 46,47).

In the *Bhagavad Gita*, a lone chapter of this great epic, we find the complete distillation of the Vaishnava doctrine.[23] Here, Krishna declares himself to be All (*sarvam*), that he is none other than *Brahman*, the supreme, transcendent Reality (VII, 19). Yet, so, too, is he Ishvara, the personal Lord, of whom *Brahman* is just an aspect of his divine nature. As Ishvara, Krishna is one with Purusha, and to this reference Arjuna reverently calls him both Purusha (X, 12, 21) and Vishnu (XI, 30), making clear the unity of the three deities. After proclaiming the nature of reality, Krishna reveals that the surest way to know God is through *bhakti* (devotion). Love for Krishna draws his grace, enabling the devotee to "enter him."

These teachings were to catch fire quickly in the hearts of the people. In the third century B. C., Alexander the Great was conquering the then known world. At that time there was a Greek ambassador, Heliodoros, stationed in the Madhya Pradesh region of India. He leaves us with an inscription on a column amongst the remains of one of the oldest temples yet found in India. This ancient inscription declares that:

> the erection of this Garuda column was in honor of Devadeva Vasudeva (Krishna) by Bhagavata Heliodora... who came as an ambassador from the Greek king of Takshashila to the court of the king Kashiputra of Vidisha[24]

The title Bhagavata [25] which Heliodoros proudly adds to his name is the name of an early devotional cult of Krishna, who is here called Devadeva Vasudeva (the God amongst gods), and leaves little doubt as to why he erected the column. He was a convert. It was an expression of his devotion for this euhemeric path which saw in Krishna the Supreme made manifest.

With the rise of the Bhagavatas, Vaishnavism had blossomed into a major movement that would eventually spread throughout India and Nepal

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NOTES

1 *Mahabharata* xii, 334, 27, translated by Kamala Subramaniam (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan: Bombay, 1985).

2 Monier-Williams, M. *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. Motilal Banarsidas: Delhi, 1981.

3 Raychaudhuri, Hemchandra. *Materials for the Study of the Early History of the Vaishnava Sect*. Oriental Books: New Delhi; 1975. p. 7; and others.

4 Translated as "righteousness" or "religion."

5 Avinashananda, Swami. *Cultural Heritage of India.* V. II *Rig-Veda* I 22. 17, 18, 20, 21.

6 See *Monier Williams.*

7 *Op. cit.,* Raychaudhuri. p. 7.

8 Thomas, Edward. *Vedic Hymns.* Wisdom of the East publications: London, John Murray. 1923 I. 154.

9 Gonda, Jan. *Aspects of Early Vishnuism* . Athlone Press, 1970. chapter V.

10 *Op. cit., Cultural Heritage of India. Rig-Veda.* VIII 100.3 4.5.

11 Radhakrishnan and Moore. *Sourcebook in Indian Philosophy.* Princeton University Press: Princeton, p. 19.

12 *Satapatha-Brahmana,* (XIV, 2-4) Translated by J. Eggeling in *Sacred Books of the East,*.ed. Max Muller. Oxford: Claredon Press, 1895. V. XIV p. 403.

13 *Ibid., Sacred Books of the East,* p. 403.

14 Bhandarkar, Ramakrishna. *Vaishnavism, Shaivism and Minor Religious Systems* Asian Educational Services: New Delhi, 1983; p. 44.

15 *Ibid.,* Bhandarkar, p. 43.

16 Banerjea, J.N. *Religion in Art and Archeology.* Upper India Publishing House: LUcknow, 1968, p. 20.

17 *Op. cit., Sacred Books of the East,* p. 442.

18 *Op. cit.,* Raychaudhuri, p. 9.

19 Subrahmanian, N. S. *Encyclopedia of the Upanishads.* Sterling Publishers: New Delhi, 1985; p. 317.

20 *Op. cit.,* Radhakrishnan & Moore, p. 90.

21 Gonda, J. *Vishnuism and Shaivism.* Athlone Press, 1970 p. 20.

22 *Op. cit., Cultural Heritage of India,* V. II.

23 Unless noted otherwise I have consulted translation by Winthrop Sargeant (*The Bhagavad-Gita.* State University of New York Press: Albany, 1984.)

24 *Op. cit.*, Banerjea, p. 7.

25 The name Bhagavata apparently comes from the reference in the *Chandogya-Upanishad* and to passages in the *Bhagavad Gita* where Krishna is referred to as Bhagavat.

Chapter Two

Krishna Comes to the Valley

Changu Narayan is rich in all that the historian and artist love.
*There are within its courtyard inscriptions which have given a key to the darkest passage in Nepal's history...*1

The Puranic [2] literature of Hinduism consists of the ancient tales of gods and people passed down orally for aeons and finally written down in the later centuries A. D. They form the basis for the Nepalese peoples' understanding of the world's origin, history, and make-up. In the *Nepal-mahatmya* (a local Purana) we find the following legend, markedly similar to a Buddhist version,[3] regarding the origin of Kathmandu Valley:

> An ancient demon king by the name of Banasura was the sovereign of the valley area. One day his daughter, princess Usha, came to him with the request that he provide her with a place to swim. Thus, the mighty king blocked up his kingdom's two mighty rivers, the Vishnumati and Bhagmati, and created a dam within the natural walls of the valley hills. Sometime later the princess had a dream about a beautiful young man with whom she fell madly in love. The following morning she used the help of a painter to have the features of her beloved recreated. Using this painting as a guide, the princess found the object of her love in the Indian kingdom of Dwaraka. His name was Aniruddha and he was the grandson of Dwaraka's beloved king, Lord Krishna. This Krishna was not only king. He was the divine embodiment of Vishnu. Thus, when the princess used her tremendous magical powers to capture Aniruddha and bring him to her palace, she was unknowingly asking for more than she had bargained. When Lord Krishna discovered his grandson had been captured he marched with his army to reclaim him. Knowing of Lord Krishna's greatness the demon king called upon Lord Shiva, the king's chosen deity, to assist in battle. In the battle that ensued Krishna emerged victorious. And he returned to Dwaraka with both his grandson and, since his grandson had fallen in love, the princess. Before leaving, however, at the request of his army of devotees, who were cowherders and who favored the fertile valley as a place to live, Krishna used his razor-sharp *chakra* (wheel) to cut the valley wall and drain the lake.[4]

Thus, did the history of the Valley begin. Geologists assert that, indeed, in Neolithic times, the valley region was a lake. The waters having now drained away, the soil is rich in nutrients. For hundreds of years, its abundant production of fruits and vegetables has drawn many peoples. The above myth suggests the historic movement of a Vaishnava people into the Valley. As the myth shows (and historical records indicate), Shaivism, the worship of Shiva, was then already practiced by the indigenous peoples. It is also accepted that at the time Vaishnavism entered, Buddhism was starting to flourish. Thus, it

the author could rewrite the myth he would say that, "Krishna, after defeating Shiva, was confronted with Lord Buddha who asked in a gentle voice that Krishna's cowherders live peacefully amidst the members of the Buddhist *sangha* (community). At this point Shiva, only slightly wounded, revived himself, and the three made a mutual agreement of religious tolerance."

Like most temples in the valley, Changu Narayan contains a mixture of Shaivite, Buddhist, and Vaishnavite motifs, the fruit of the tolerant and syncretic atmosphere of Nepalese religion. Presently, we shall examine the history of their origins looking to place the entrance of Vaishnavism in historical context. To do this we begin in pre-historic Nepal at a time when, some five thousand years ago, the Harappa civilization flourished near the waters of the Indus river of northern India. From the remains of this great culture, archaeologists have unearthed clay pots bearing the icons of an ancient Shiva prototype. They often show a horned man in the classical posture of a *yogin*, sitting with erect phallus in a cross-legged position. Dated at 2500 B C. these images antedate the Vedas by a thousand years.[5]

The trade route from Nepal to the valley of the Indus river is quite accessible, and, historians theorize, was probably traveled often. Who the travelers were is not known. The ancient history of Nepal is shrouded in myth and mystery. Perhaps they were nomads who migrated to Nepal from the north. No matter who they were, these peoples seem to have inherited the Shaivite tradition which has lasted to this day. History, however, does not shed light on the presence of *Shivamarg*, "the path of Shiva,"[6] in Nepal until the rule of the Kirata people. The Kirata lineage is found in one of Nepal's primary, and only, sources of historical documentation, the *vamshavalis* (chronicles). These invaluable documents trace the descent of Nepalese rulers back to about the tenth century B. C., listing the dates of each king's sovereignty and the important events (mostly of a religious nature) which occurred during their reign. However, these chronicles were not recorded in writing until the fourteenth century, and for this reason do not stand alone as independent historical proof. The *Gopal-raj vamshavali*,[7] for example, begins with an account of the Gopala lineage who are said to have ruled about three-thousand years ago. However, there is no other evidence that these kings ruled in the Valley. It is not until the later time of the Kirata lineage, that we find evidence to supplement the *vamshavalis*. This evidence suggests strongly that the Kiratas were followers of *Shivamarg*...[8]

According to the *Gopal-raj vamshavali,* the Kiratas conquered Nepal around 700 B. C. This early date is verified in other texts. The *Artha-Shastra,* an Indian text dated at 320 B. C., speaks of Kiratas as rug weavers of the Himalayas.[9] In the *Mahabharata* (roughly 500 B. C.) the Kiratas are referred to as the "peoples of the Himalayas." They stand on the side of the Kauravas against the Krishna-led Pandava brothers, and they pay homage to Shiva.[10] That they were Shaivites, worshipers of Shiva, is further attested to by the presence of an ancient phallic symbol, the Shiva-*linga,* along the banks of the Bhagmati (a tributary of the sacred Ganges river). Dated at 400 B.C. this image, among the oldest in Nepal, was sculpted from the hands of a Kirata artist, showing clearly that the Shaivite tradition has been established in the valley for at least 2500 years.[11]

Roughly a hundred years before this *linga* was erected, Gautama Buddha was born in the region of Lumbini in northern India.[12] Although the Buddha lived out his life in India, it is believed that the Buddhist emperor Ashoka came to Nepal as early as the third century B.C., building several Buddhist *stupas* and spreading the Buddha's teaching of the Middle Way.[13] That he could construct these *stupas* suggests that the Kiratas were tolerant of the new faith and that, in these early years, Buddhist and Shaivite doctrines were both flourishing. And with these two traditions already unfolding within its walls, the Valley then had to make room for a third, for "Krishna's army" was coming...

The thirty-second Kirata king had just established his rule and, "then," the *Gopal-raj vamshavali* reads, "with the might of the Solar Line the Licchavi dynasty ruled in Nepal by defeating the Kirata king."[14] What was this powerful Solar Line which gave them victory? It was the divine lineage of Vishnu. The Licchavi rulers, in a method of genealogy known as the conical clan, traced their lineage back to Vishnu, their chosen deity from whose lotus-navel, "at the end of the aeon, Brahma emerged"[15] as the first sovereign.

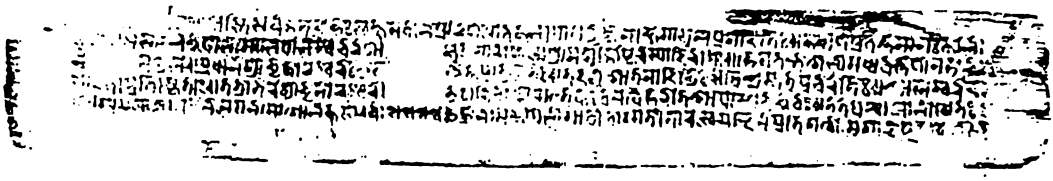
These Licchavis were *kshatriyas* (warriors) believed to have migrated up from the Indian region of Vaishali in Bihar where Licchavi presence is recorded up until the sixth century.[16] Historians have traced a matrimonial relation between the Licchavis and the Imperial Guptas of India, suggesting an intimate relation between the two lineages. This link is important because the inscriptions, literature, and icons from the Gupta age show us that the Gupta kings were followers of Vasudeva-Krishna. Their shared familial ties would

have easily led to common religious beliefs, explaining why the Licchavis took refuge in the Solar Line of Vishnu.

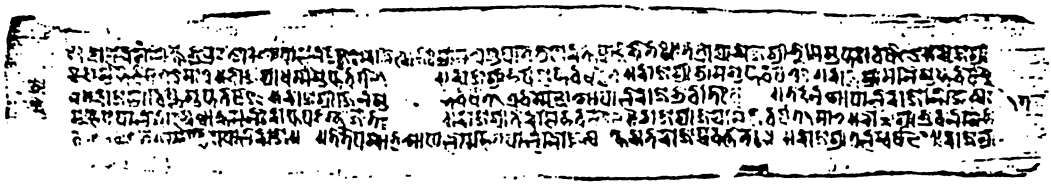
Historically, it is not clear when the Licchavis first established rule in Nepal. The tendency of scholars, due to insufficient evidence, is to place the date *in the fourth century A. D.*[17] The first mention of Vaishnavism in Nepal comes with the *vamshavali* account of the Licchavi Solar Line, suggesting that it was these Indian rulers who first brought the Vaishnava tradition to Nepal. For this reason, it is relevant to understand when their rule began. If they came as late as the fourth century, then Vaishnavism was a relatively late bloomer in the fertile religious grounds of Nepal. In such a case, Changu Narayan, being a Vaishnava temple, could have come to be no earlier then the fourth century. If, however, the Licchavi's established rule at an earlier date, then both the tradition and our Narayana temple have the added prestige of antiquity.[18]

Engraved on one of the pillars at Changu Narayan is the Valley's oldest inscription. It is here, in the courtyard atop Doladri Hill, that Nepal's recorded history begins. Filled with praise to Vishnu as Hari (the remover of suffering), this ancient inscription is written by King Manadeva of the Licchavi dynasty in the year 464 A. D. According to the *Gopal-raj vamshavali*, however, Manadeva is not the builder of the temple. This distinction belongs to an even earlier Licchavi king, Haridattavarma, who was the ninth lineal forebear of Manadeva.[19] It is commonly accepted that Haridattavarma's rule marks the beginning of Licchavi reign in Nepal; the question then becomes: how long before Manadeva did Haridattavarma establish rule? As said above, the supposed date is 300 A. D. *or later*. Such a date provides an average of only eighteen years for each period of reign for the nine kings before Manadeva.[20] The *Gopal-raj vamshavali*, however, gives an average of about fifty years per succession which would have made Haridattavarma king around 50 A. D.[21] Further, it lists *thirteen Licchavi kings prior to Haridattavarma* as ruling in the Valley. This fact is simply ignored by most scholars. The reason for this, as has been noted, is twofold: firstly, the earliest documented evidence does not come until 464 A.D.; secondly, the *vamshavali* is not accepted as independent historical proof.[22] Still, is this reason to be so conservative in estimating Licchavi rule?

It is true that the *vamshavali*s have a mythic quality, and often read more like a Purana than a historical chronicle.[23] However, they have in many instances proven to be historically accurate.[24] In this light, although often



17a



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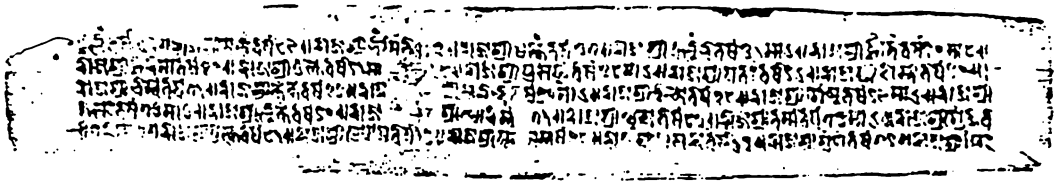
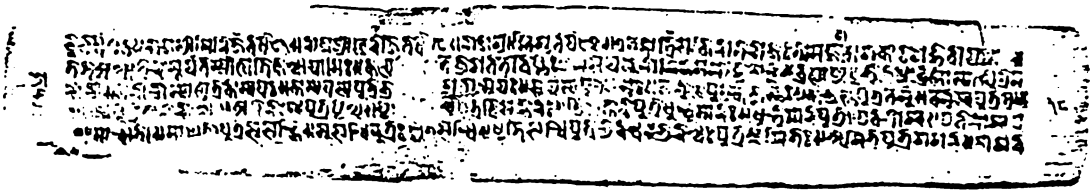


18a



18b

Facsimile Plates of Gopalarajavamsavali

dismissed by scholars, the possibility of Licchavi kings prior to Haridattavarma should not be ruled out. Indeed, it is quite possible that he *was* preceded, for in addition to Changu Narayan, he is credited with constructing three other Vaishnavite temples. Each temple is on hillocks in the Valley's four cardinal directions: with Changu Narayan in the East, Ichangu Narayan in the West, Shikhara Narayan in the South, and Lokapalasvamin Narayan, no longer in existence, in the North (See Page 24). The existence of these temples, combined with the fact that there are inscriptions from the twelfth and eighteenth century proclaiming Haridattavarma as their builder,[25] suggests that the *vamshavali* is accurate on this point. That he constructed these temples, especially in such significant locations, indicates clearly that Vaishnavism, under his early rule, was the religion of the court. Was he the *first* Licchavi conqueror? Did his conquest bring the Vaishnava tradition to Nepal, or was it already present, having been established by his Licchavi predecessors?

Tracing the lineal descent given in the *Gopal-raj vamshavali* (and using the modest model of twenty-five years per royal succession), it becomes evident that the Licchavis could have *first established rule in 86 B. C.*[26] However, this date (which is conservative compared with the average years per succession listed in the *vamshavali)* predates the accepted one by nearly *four hundred years*! The reason is that, as we have noted, no evidence predates the Changu Narayan inscription. Yet, this early inscription is a vital key to Nepal's past and should be used to open an accurate view of the past. By taking this inscription and saying, in essence: "This marks the beginning of Licchavi rule," we are perhaps doing an injustice to historical truth.

Manadeva's inscription proves the existence of Licchavi sovereignty, in 464 A.D. The *vamshavali* also notes this and claims further that it was Haridattavarma, the ninth king before Manadeva, who consecrated Changu and four other Narayana temples. This again is verified by the existence of these temples and two inscriptions which proclaim Haridattavarma to be their builder. If the chroniclers are accurate on these two vital points, why would they not be accurate in saying there were many predecessors to Haridattavarma? In rebuttal, the historian might say, rightfully, "Yes, but there is nothing on the ancient architecture, coins or monuments which *proves* an early Licchavi arrival." There are two plausible explanations for this. First, and simply, there has been very little archaeological research into Nepal's past. It was only thirty years ago that Nepal was opened to the West. It has only

been in the last two decades that anthropologists have started doing any scientific (i.e. western) historical research. What work has been done is very restricted by Nepali law. Excavation is strictly disallowed. In many cases, the inscriptions within a temple are not allowed to be studied. This leaves a very limited range of historical documents; and yet, what evidence is available, due to the minimal extent of past research, is by no means exhausted. It is not unlikely that the pillar(s) and/or statue(s) with an inscription older then 464 A.D. has just not yet been found, and, perhaps, never will be.[27]

The second explanation is that the Licchavis, like all of India, may have been under the powerful sovereignty of their Gupta cousins. Coins bearing the Gupta insignia have been found in Nepal from the third and fourth centuries A.D. After 464 A. D. they have Licchavi emblems.[28] Manadeva's pillar inscription at Changu Narayan boldly proclaims the king's military power saying that after he marched towards the east and did battle, the "disloyal feudatories bent their heads in surrender, letting fall their festoons."[29] Perhaps these disloyal rulers were ambassadors of the Gupta king. With their defeat Manadeva was inspired to declare his country's independence in stone in the courtyard of "the Vishnu residing on Doladri Hill, he who is worshiped by the Gods as the greatest of all. Victory to him!"[30]

Scholars may argue that placing the beginning of Licchavi rule in 96 B. C. is too early. Yet, in light of the evidence (i.e. the Manadeva inscription, the four Narayana temples constructed by Haridattavarma, and the *Gopal-raj vamshavali),* the possibility of Gupta suzerainty, and the limitation on historical research in Nepal, the date of 300 A.D. seems far too conservative. Why is this important? The western focus on linear time lends prestige to that which is ancient. This book is suggesting that the Licchavi's, "Krishna's army," brought Vaishnavism to Nepal, and enquires as to the date of their arrival. The resulting estimation has pushed the beginning of Licchavi rule back several hundred years. This is a significant extension of years which has important implications. To the religious scholar it suggests that Vaishnavism, Buddhism and Shaivism have thrived together in the Valley not just sixteen, but perhaps as much as twenty-one hundred years. To the historian it implies that far from the Licchavi dynasty beginning with Haridattavarma, his reign may stand as a high-point of Licchavi rule. If this is in fact the case, then Changu Narayan marks not the emergence, but the apogee of Vaishnava influence in the Valley. Further, by pushing back the date of Haridattavarma and the Licchavi dynasty, we come upon the very real possibility, of special interest to

historians of art, that Changu Narayan is the site of one of the oldest pagoda temples in the world. All of these implications have important bearing for this book and will be discussed further in later chapters.

Having begun with an historical analysis of the temple, it is evident that Changu Narayan is a very important structure. The age of this edifice spans two millennia. Nepal's recorded history opens without preamble in its courtyard. Here we find a fifth century inscription, which although itself ancient, points to a dynastic line that appears to stretch back hundreds of years earlier. Entering the temple courtyard is a very powerful experience. In the United States we are awed by a relic or monument from the eighteenth century. Yet, this is a monument which predates the founding of our country by nearly sixteen hundred years. The fact that it is still standing is a clear statement of its cultural value.

While in our minds this is the case, to the Nepalese, historical documentation is not needed to prove Changu Narayan's great importance. This is the dwelling of their beloved Narayana. It is the ancient myths which reveal the temple's power and worth, not royal inscriptions; and it is time to hear these tales which the Nepalese know so well. We have discussed the temple in terms of so many hundreds of years in linear time. Narayana, though, is the Supreme Being. His great importance to the Nepalese is not that He is possibly two thousand years old, but that He is eternal. His temple may appear as temporal, but it is the body of the Lord. It is the physical manifestation of a transcendent reality, a reality towards which the Vaishnavite, Shaivite and Buddhist traditions all point. Indeed, although "Krishna's army" (the Vaishnavite Licchavis) at first did battle with Shiva and the demon Banasura (the Buddhist and Shaivite Kiratas), the ensuing years have been marked by a religious tolerance rarely heard of in these times of religious persecution. While legend tells us that the Vishnu-Narayana tradition was established in Nepal through violence, the ensuing years have been marked by peace. To a modern scholar, the Shaivite, Buddhist and Vaishnava traditions appear not as warring gods and demons, but as three great rivers which, though their branches are separate, have blended in the vast ocean of Nepalese culture.

NOTES

Landon, Perceval. *Nepal*. Ratna Pustak Bhandar: Kathmandu, Nepal. 1987, p. 221.

2 The word *purana* means 'ancient.'

3 In the Buddhist legend, it is the Boddhisattva Manjushri who drains the lake. See *Iconography of Religions*, "Religion in Nepal." by K. R. Van Kooilj, 1978, p.19.

4 The *Nepal-mahatmya* (Nepal the Noble, or Eminent) is a local Purana that was incorporated into the well-known *Skanda-purana* at an unknown date, but most likely around the fourteenth century. The version I have consulted – Muktinath Khanal, *Nepal-mahatmya*, (Kathmandu: Nepala Rajakiya Prajnapratisthana, v.s. 2028) – gives the Sanskrit verses followed by a Nepali translation. The above creation myth comes from chapter II, pp. 1-69, which I have paraphrased from an English translation by Mukunda Raj Aryal.

5 For more on the Harappa civilization see: Sir Mortimer Wheeler, *The Indus Valley civilization*. Second edition, Cambridge, 1960.

6 Even today the term *Shivamarg* (path of Shiva) refers to the worship of any Hindu god.

7 There are several *vamshavli*'s (chronicles), but I have chosen to draw solely from the *Gopal-raj vamshavali* (the Chronicle of the Gopala KIngs) because it is generally accepted to be the most important and most accurate of the *vamshavalis*·

8 See: Thappa, Netra. (*A Short History of Nepal*. Ratna Pustak Bhandar: Kathmandu, 1981) pp. 1-10.

9 According to Mukunda Aryal, this rug-weaving tradition continues today amongst the local Newari-Kirata caste.

10 *Op. cit.*, Thappa, p. 10.

11 Thappa gives a brief discussion of this *linga*. However, the early date is based on a stylistic analysis by Mukunda Aryal.

12 Although today Lumbini is in southern Nepal, in the Buddha's time it was part of India's extended domain.

13 Although historians question whether these ancient *stupas* attributed to Ashoka were actually his doing, there is no doubt of their antiquity, nor that Ashoka came to Nepal. See Waldshmidt, Ernst and Rose. *Nepal*, p. 17, for further discussion.

14 *Gopalraj-Vamshavali*, translated by Vajracharya and Malla. University Press: Kathmandu, 1978; folio 18.

15 *Ibid.*, Vajracharya and Malla, folio 19.

16 Deo, Shantaram. *Glimpses of Nepal Woodwork*. Journal of Indian Society of Oriental Art: Calcutta, 1969; p. 7.

17 See Mary Slusser's discussion in *Nepal Mandala*, "The Licchavi's : Consolidation of the State," (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1982), for an excellent historical account and bibliography. She, like Pratyapaditya Pal and others, estimates Licchavi rule to have begun, *at the earliest*, 300 A. D.

18 Mukunda Aryal is the leading proponent of the antiquity of Changu Narayana and Nepalese Vaishnavism. Unfortunately, he has only lectured and has not published his many years of research. Fortunately, this research was shared with the author through several conversations.

19 The Licchavi dynastic line is traced in the *Gopal-raj vamshavali*, folios 19-21.

20 So the reader can follow my logic: I have taken the year 464 (the date of Manadeva's rule) and subtracted from it 300 (Haridattavarma's estimated year of sovereignty) to get 164. I have then divided this number by 9 (the number of kings, including Haridattavarma, prior to Manadeva.)

21 I came to this date by a similar calculation as to the above footnote: I added the number of years for each king and divided by the number of kings.

22 The obvious reason for this is that they were not compiled until the 14th century. Oral tradition was thus the chief source of information for the chroniclers; however, oral history was supplemented with certain documentary materials which have now largely disappeared. See Mary Slusser's discussion in *Nepal Mandala* (*Op. cit., p. 19*).

23 Take, for example, this opening passage from folio 17: "In the course of time, with the advent of the Kali Yuga, in the kingdom of Yudhishthira whose feet were decorated with garland of crowns of all kings,...Sri Bhattaraka (the venerable lord) emerged in the land (the Nepal Valley)."

24 See Vajracharya's introduction to *Gopal-raj Vamshavali*.

25 See Slusser, p. 252.

26 Calculation as follows: 22 [the number of Licchavi generations prior to Manadeva (including the 13 prior to Haridattavarma)] x 25 (years per generation) = 550 years. Then deduct 550 from 464 A. D. (the year of Manadeva's reign) and we get 96 B. C. *Remember, 25 years is a conservative average; the *Gopal-raj vamshavali* average is closer to 50 years, which would push the date back to 564 B. C.!

27 Currently, there is a controversial debate over whether religious sites should become the field site of historians.

28 In addition to explaining why Licchavi emblems are not found at an earlier date, these early Gupta coins add further evidence to the possibility of Vaishnava presence in Nepal. The Guptas were Vaishnavite. It is likely that their economic presence in Nepal was surely coupled with a religious one. However, this presence would have not been felt earlier than the third century A. D. since it was in this period that the Gupta kings came to power. If the Licchavis came to Nepal as early as 96 B. C., then the logical explanation is that the evidence (if any remains) has not been found.

29 Inscription translated by Mukunda Raj Aryal; V. 16.

30 *Ibid.*, V. I. See, also, discussion in Slusser, p.23. See Appendix A for full translation.

Chapter Three

Mythic Origins of Changu Narayan

Hindu Myths

Although the Valley is filled with temples and images of Lord Vishnu, no image or place is more sacred than the hill of Doladri, the home of the deity Changu Narayana. The *Nepal-mahatmya* gives an interesting account of the temple's origin. It reveals that Doladri is the place of an ancient hierophany, a sacred space that has been sanctified not only by the descent of the gods to earth, but by the beheading of Vishnu which unleashed His supreme power.

> At the dawn of the present age, there was a tremendous battle between the gods and demons. Led by King Mura the demon army was invincible. Shiva, pleased with Mura's great *tapasya* (austerities), had granted the wicked demon a boon that had made him immune to the power of any god. The powerful king and his army, breathing flames of death from their terrific faces, were too much for the gods. Led by Vishnu they fled from the heavens and took shelter in the *Champaka* [1] forest on the hill outside the city of Bhaktapur. In hot pursuit, the demons followed them and began to shake the hill like a hammock to force the gods from their hiding place. In order to save the gods, Lord Shiva appeared in His supreme form as a *linga* and drilled through the center of the hill and deep into the earth to form a support for the gods. Just as the gods had been saved, King Mura found Vishnu and with a quick merciless blow of his sword, removed the benign head of the Lord. At this moment, from out of the fallen body, Lakshmi (Vishnu's female aspect) emerged in beheaded form and slew the demon. Although immune to the power of any god, Mura could not overcome Bhagavan Vishnu who in truth is Narayana, the Supreme Being, in whom all gods reside. Once again good had triumphed over evil in the endless dance of opposing forces. The rejoicing gods declared they would always stay on the now sacred hill.[2]

This myth notes that Mura could not be killed by a god, yet when he beheaded Vishnu, who seemed but one of many gods, Vishnu's supreme power—symbolized as the goddess—emerged and destroyed the demon. This symbolism is very important in understanding the motifs and religious message of Changu Narayan. It reveals that the temple atop Doladri is not only highly unique, but immensely powerful. Enshrined within the central complex is a god whose beheading establishes Him not as *a* god, but *the God*. In the temple courtyard, in a shrine adjacent to Narayana's, Lakshmi is enshrined in the rare, Tantric form called Chinnamasta-Devi (the Beheaded

Goddess). This image not only fits the description of the goddess in the above myth, but also has significant bearing on the symbolism of the beheaded Changu Narayana. Indeed, as Slusser has noted, "it is unlikely to be mere coincidence that the most important Nepalese manifestation of the headless *yogini*, Chinnamasta, resides in an adjacent temple [to the headless Narayana]."[3] Scripture tells us that in beheaded form the goddess gives rise to creation. When beheaded her life-blood is released, bringing forth the *Vishvarupa* or Universal Form.[4]

Just as Vishnu and Chinnamasta still abide atop Doladri, so, too, has Shiva (known locally as Kileshvar Mahadeva) held true to his promise to remain atop the "now sacred hill."[5] As the hill was shaken by the demons it is named Doladri Hill, the "Swinging Hill."[6] The famous inscription of 464 A.D. speaks of the central image as Doladri Narayana. From this we can see that although the *Nepal-mahatmya* was written somewhere around the fifteenth century, the myth of Changu Narayan's origin is possibly sixteen hundred years old.[7]

The *Nepal-mahatmya* offers yet a second origin myth. Like the one above, this myth also begins on the battlefield of the gods and demons. Here, we are told:

> Vishnu committed one of the five most heinous crimes. He beheaded the *brahmin* priest Sumati. That Sumati was a demon made no difference, for the universal law of *karma* which says that every action returns its fruits to the doer, was applicable even to the Lord of Lords, He who had Himself created the Law from His own being. Just to make sure that Vishnu would not escape His fate, Sukracharya, the *guru* of the demons, cursed the Lord. Knowing his fate to be inevitable, Vishnu took to His mount Garuda, the sunbird, and wandered the regions of the three realms until he came at last to the summit of Doladri where he took up residence in a forest of *champaka* trees.
>
> In this forest there lived a *brahmin* priest, Sudarshana by name, who had only one cow to support him. On the day after the Lord's arrival in the forest, this cow would not give milk. Frustrated with his futile efforts at milking, the *brahmin* tied the cow to a nearby *champaka* tree and began to observe her for any curious behavior. After some time, to the priest's amazement, from the tree emerged a handsome young man who proceeded to milk the cow. As the *brahmin* watched the young man place the milk to his lips, his bewilderment turned to anger, his blood curdled, and grabbing a nearby axe he was impelled by rage to deliver the fated blow. The fallen torso transformed into Vishnu, who arose beheaded and declared, "Freed from this curse I shall stay here. Oh Sudarshana! Worship me here. Persons who worship me on the twelfth day of the moon or the day of the full moon, as well as Wednesday, will definitely reach Heaven.'"[8]

The Changu Narayana priest offers a slightly different version of this myth. During an interview with the author, he explained that when Vishnu

emerged from the tree His form was not that of a "handsome young man," but, "a dark little boy," whom the *brahmin* took to be a ghost. If his form had been that of a handsome young man, the priest explained, the *brahmin* would not have killed Him. Since His form was terrifying, the *brahmin* was frightened and thus killed the God.[9]

Although this tale of the beheaded god is unique to Nepal and the Changu Narayana tradition, it is clearly related to a legend in the fourteenth *kanda* of the *Satapatha Brahmana* (XIV, I, I, 1-33). Included in this tale is the important theme of Vishnu's supremacy:

> The gods were performing a sacrifice and decided to make it a competition saying that, "Whoever of us, through austerity..., shall first reach the end of the sacrifice shall be the most excellent of us." Vishnu first attained it and thus became the "most excellent of gods." Upon his victory, Vishnu was filled with pride. Leaning his head over on his upright bow, Vishnu stood silent, absorbed in his own greatness. The gods, not daring to attack him, sent forth ants to gnaw his bowstring. After some time the string snapped, and springing upwards, severed his head from his body, which fell and became the sun. Seeing Vishnu's limp body they were filled with anguish at the loss of their supreme Lord, and they pleaded with the Ashvins, the heavenly physicians, to restore Him to life.[10]

Yet another version tells us that Vishnu had failed to honor a pledge he had entered into with his companion deities.[11] In an act of self-retribution Vishnu, with his own bow, decapitated himself. In this myth we again find the law of *karma* illustrated. A law so powerful that even the Lord is not free from it. As the embodiment of *dharma*, Vishnu accepts the way of justice by administering the penalty with his own hand, creating a very powerful symbolism. On another symbolic level, Vishnu's fallen head is a powerful creative act which gives rise to "the pure essence" (*Satapatha-Brahmana* XIV, 1,1, 18).[12] During the daily ritual at the temple, Vishnu's beheading is reenacted. The significance and symbolism of the beheaded Supreme God will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Nepalese Syncretism and the Buddhist Myth

When one speaks to the people of Nepal about the connection between Hinduism and Buddhism, a common reply is: "The Buddha was an incarnation of Vishnu. Shiva is Buddha. They're (It's) the same."[13] There seems to be an acceptance and understanding that although God has many forms, He is still One. *Bhagavan* (the blessed Lord)[14] can be worshiped as

Vishnu, Shiva, or Buddha. The specific name and form vary, yet the essence remains the same.

On *Maha-Shiva-ratri* (the great night of Shiva) a Nepali will go to Shiva's temple at Pashupatinath. On the *ekadashi*, a special day of worship for Vaishnavites, he will do *puja* to Lord Vishnu; and on the full moon in May, the celebrated *Baishak Purnima*, the one day on which Lord Buddha was born, then later attained enlightenment, and ultimately died, he will worship this form of *Bhagavan*. "To what is One the sages give many a name," the *Rig-Veda* (I, 64) declares.

In a classic synthesis, the *Nepal-mahatmya* tells the legend of Janardana, an emanation of Vishnu, coming to Nepal in the form of the Buddha to establish a *linga* named Karunikesvara.[15] This combination of Shaivite, Vaishnava, and Buddhist deities is common throughout Nepal. At the shrine of Budha Nilakantha (the old blue-throated Lord), just north of Kathmandu nestled at the base of Shivapuri mountain, there is a Jalashayana Vishnu (lying-on-the-waters-Vishnu). This massive image depicts, it seems, Vishnu lying on the serpent god Shesha atop the waters of pre-creation. However, the name Nilakantha comes from a particular form of Shiva known as Nilakantha Mahadeva (the Great Blue-throated One),[16] and thus Shaivite Nepalis honor this reclining deity not as Vishnu, but Shiva. And what about the Buddhists? They translate the word "Budha" (old, ancient) as "the Buddha," and worship the reclining deity as a Buddhist god, the *bodhisattva* (being-of-light) Nilakantha Lokeshvara.[17] Interestingly enough, this *bodhisattva* is a transfer into the Buddhist pantheon of the Shaivite deity Nilakantha Mahadeva. Thus, Budha Nilakantha is worshiped variously as Vishnu, Shiva or Avalokiteshvara.[18] So, one may rightfully ask, who is he *really*? However, this question of identity is perhaps not so important to the Nepalese. Both Buddhist and Hindus share the common understanding, based on scriptural doctrine, that the ultimate reality (called *Atman* by the Hindus; *Anatta*, by the Buddhists) is beyond form.[19]

Both this notion of the formless, or "Form beyond form," and Nepalese syncretism [20] are found in an analysis of the shaivite temple of Pashupatinath. For many Hindus this is the home of the most sacred Shiva image in the world. The central image is a *linga* depicting the phallus in union with a *yoni*, or female organ. This is not a symbol of sex, but of the power of the Divine in its creative aspect. Depending on who you talk to, the Pashupati *linga* is either a *caturmukhalinga* (four-faced linga) or a *pancamukhalinga* (five-faced linga).

The *linga* itself shows only four carved faces emerging from its elongated shaft (see four-faced *linga* in plate #61). However, to the Pashupatas, the Shaiva sect most intimately associated with Nepal, there is an implied fifth head at the top of the shaft. The four visible faces, they say, symbolize but four of Shiva's five cosmic powers—creation, destruction, sustenance, and concealment; the fifth, invisible face is Shiva's power of grace (*anugruha*) which bestows enlightenment on, and thus can only be seen by, his devotees. In the eyes of the Pashupata, Shiva's *caturmukhalinga* appears as *pancamukha*.[21]

The Pashupati *linga* is a very rare image, not because it is believed to be multi-faced, but because of who these faces are. Nearly always,[22] the faces on a *caturmukhalinga* are Shiva's. They may have different facial expressions to show different aspects of the god, but each is still an iconographic symbol of Shiva. However, only one of the faces on the Pashupati *linga* can properly be called Shiva's; the other three are clearly Vishnu, Surya (the Hindu sun god), and, most interestingly, the Buddha.[23] Further, the *Svayambhu-purana*, a Buddhist *mahatmya*, identifies Pashupati as Avalokiteshvara, and affirms that he "will receive homage from local *brahmins*."[24] A current festival also shows the relation of the Buddhist and Shaivite deities. Annually, on the day of *mukhastami* (the crowning of the face) the *linga* is adorned with a *bodhisattva* crown. On this day the temple (normally open only for Hindus) is open to the Buddhists who may worship the *linga* as Avalokiteshvara.[25]

Another image, of particular interest to the author, is found throughout the city of Kathmandu. Most often one comes across it while meandering through the back streets of this mysterious city. It is a *caitya* (statue) remarkably similar to a four faced Shiva-*linga* except with one important difference—the Buddha and not Shiva, seated in different meditative postures, is found on all four sides. A statue depicting these four Buddhas is not so rare. What seems unique is that it is placed on a *yoni*.[26] To the author's knowledge these images are unique to Nepal. Mukunda Aryal says that one can only speculate about their origin. He offers two theories: firstly, they are the result of purely syncretic thought, expressed in stone through the creative hands of the medieval Nepalese sculptors; or, secondly, they are the result of a small Buddhist revolution which seems to have taken place in the eighteenth century when the Hindu Gorkhas[27] captured the Valley.[28] If the former theory is true, then these *caityas* are a perfect example of the Valley's blend of Hindu and Buddhist motifs. If the latter theory is true, then they symbolize a brief period in Nepal's history when religious tolerance was not the rule.

Sculptural art is not the only arena in which this syncretism is exhibited. In Buddhist mythology it is told that Lord Buddha once rose to heaven to preach to his parents. In representation of his return to earth, "the miracle of the Descent from the Tushita heaven," the Nepali painter (*chitrakar*) has occasionally depicted Vishnu as an attendant of the Buddha. This is not textually prescribed, and thus must be a creation arisen from the artist's understanding of the two divinities' relatedness.[29]

On the other side of the spectrum, Vishnu is sometimes considered by the followers of Vajrayana or Tantric Buddhism to be a *mara* (demon). In such a case Vishnu is seen being crushed beneath the foot of a Buddhist deity either in sculpture or painting.[30] In the Buddhist *Narayanapariprucha* text, however, Vishnu is described as a *bodhisattva*, an enlightened being who, instead of entering *Nirvana* to be forever released from the pains of the world, takes a vow to remain until all sentient beings have achieved enlightenment. In these texts reference is made to His Three Steps.[31]

In the medieval period another interesting example is to be found. It comes from a Vajrayana Buddhist text, the *Ekallavira Chanda Maharoshana Tantra*, in which the Buddha declares: "In whichever form men worship Me, in that form I will be present for the good of all sentient beings."[32] It is a verse which seems to have been placed in the Buddha's mouth by Lord Krishna himself. In the more ancient *Bhagavad Gita* (IV, 11) text Krishna says: "In whatever way men approach me, even so do I reward them; My path do men tread in all ways, O Arjuna!"[33]

In the early twentieth century after the English dignitary, Perceval Landon, had visited Nepal, he wrote: "The continuity of life and faith has suffered from no religious intolerance for, strange though it may seem, Buddhism and Hinduism have here met and kissed each other."[34] Indeed, it may seem strange after travelling through India (as Landon did) and seeing there that the Buddhist and Hindu traditions are clearly divided, or (as most of us have) studying the common belief of scholars that Buddhism was a rebellion to Hindu doctrines of the *Atman* ("the soul") and *varnashrama* (the caste system).[35] In truth, Buddhism is part of the main stream of Indian and Nepalese thought. While having been nearly completely removed from India by the tenth century A. D. (in the main through Muslim invasions), Buddhism has flourished for over twenty-three hundred years in Nepal. The syncretism we have seen only seems strange because of our misunderstanding. Actually, the Nepal case should be seen not as an "oddity," but as a natural blending of two

traditions which arose on common geographical and philosophical soil. The error by past scholars has been to look too shallowly at the surface differences. Nepal offers an excellent arena in which to correct these views, and to seek a deeper understanding of the connection between Buddhism and Hinduism. Doing so, we will discover that "the more deeply we penetrate Buddhist and Brahmanical [Hindu] thought, the less is it possible to divide them."[36]

After studying the complexities of the Hindu-Buddhist syncretism, Landon's metaphor of a kiss seems beautifully appropriate. What has happened in Nepal seems the natural result of the people's longing to know God. In this peaceful land beliefs have merged in an attempt to understand life. What this has taught the people is that their beliefs are the same, they emanate from and ultimately lead to the same goal. They have "kissed" not as strangers, but as long time friends.

When looking at the inscriptional records, it becomes clear that the Nepalese kings have rarely felt a conflict between the Buddhist and Hindu *dharmas* (religions). Take, for example, Manadeva (464-505), who claimed no specific religion. Manadeva's grandfather, Vrishadeva, was a Buddhist, and perhaps for this reason, Manadeva made numerous important Buddhist donations and chose a Buddhist temple as his site of penance. Yet, as we have seen, he saw no conflict in erecting a victory pillar to Lord Vishnu in the courtyard of Changu Narayan. Similarly, his daughter Vijayavati found it fitting to erect a Shiva-*linga* in memory of her father. Even King Amshuvarman (607 A.D.), although a proclaimed Shaivite, showed his patronage to Changu Narayana [37] and other Hindu deities, and even erected a Buddhist *vihara* (temple). Likewise, Jayadeva (713-733 A. D.), upon offering a silver lotus to Pashupati, was moved to honor Avalokiteshvara.[38]

This brief overview of the synthesis of Buddhism and Hinduism in Nepalese culture is not to overwhelm the reader but to better prepare him/her to understand Changu Narayan. This temple is a miniature of the culture which produced it. An analysis of its myths, symbols and motifs reveals the overriding themes of the Valley. Changu Narayan exhibits the same synthesis of Vaishnava, Shaivite and Buddhist themes we have seen at Budha Nilakantha and other shrines. None of these shrines is unique; each reflects in different ways the pervasive spirit of Nepalese syncretism which manifest in the people's speech, as well as their shrines and statues, as a vital part of their world-view.

With this understanding, we return to the courtyard atop Doladri to hear the Buddhist myth of Changu Narayan's origin:

> After a long battle with the serpent Takshaka, Garuda, ancient enemy of the slithery crawler, was about to destroy his foe. At this point the Buddhist deity Avalokiteshvara, the *bodhisattva* of compassion, intervened and prevented Garuda's slaying blow. To reconcile the mighty sunbird he draped the snake around Garuda's neck in an act which symbolizes the ultimate and final union of even antagonistic forces. In humility Vishnu, seated on his snake-adorned mount, took Avalokiteshvara on his shoulders to create the image Hari-Hari-vahanodbhava-Lokeshvara (The Lord of the vehicle which removes suffering). At the moment the three gods had so arranged themselves, a griffin came upon the spot and took them to Doladri Hill where he installed them in the hilltop shrine.[39]

While the image in the temple clearly fits the iconographic qualities of Garudasana-Narayana (the sunbird seat of Narayana), to the many Buddhist faithful who visit the temple, the image is that of Avalokiteshvara. Although the central image may be a disputed Buddhist deity, there is no question of the beautiful sculpture standing across from the eastern doorway (See page 24).[40] This is clearly Avalokiteshvara, who, perhaps tired of sitting on Vishnu's shoulders, has opted for a more comfortable spot in the sun where he can be easily admired by his devotees. This *Bodhisattva* is not alone in the temple courtyard. The Buddhists claim that, in truth, the Shiva image of Kileshvar Mahadeva is the *bodhisattva* Samantabadhra, and the beheaded image of Chinnamasta is the Tantric Buddhist deity Vajra Yogini.[41]

This tendency of Buddhist assimilation, as we have seen, is common throughout the Valley. In some cases, such as that of Shiva and Avalokiteshvara, the parallels between the two deities are so strong, it is hard not to blend them. In others, as with Kileshvar and Samantabadhra, there are only distant connections. In these instances, the notion of a transcendent form comes into play. In the fourth century Indian text, the *Boddhisattva-Bhumi*, the author Asanga writes, "The Buddha can take any form, including Hindu deities."[42] In the eyes of the Buddhist the Buddha is the substratum of all forms. To see a Hindu deity as Buddhist is to acknowledge this supreme form, known as the *Dharma-kaya*, as the essence of all form.[43]

While the notion of *Anatta* relates more directly with *Brahman* in suggesting a formless substratum, the *Dharma-kaya* (essence-body) is the Buddhist equivalent of the Hindu *Purusha* (Supreme Spirit, Cosmic Man) as That from which all arises. The *Dharma-kaya* is but a different name for a

common theme shared by both traditions; a theme which naturally leads to religious toleration and synthesis. It is the foundation upon which the Nepalese, Hindu and Buddhist, can place their belief that "*Bhagavan* is One." It is this vision, of the One beyond, behind, and within the many, that Changu Narayan expresses. And it is to an analysis of this amazing vision, as it is expressed in architecture, that we now turn. Academically speaking, Changu Narayan is a Hindu temple, and will be studied as such. For this reason, for the most part, our comparison with Buddhism will be left behind. However, this understanding of the *Dharma-kaya*, of a Form which takes all forms, must be carried with us. It must be deeply understood if we are to imbibe the symbolic message of the temple. Changu Narayan is but one example of a world view that pervades Nepalese thought. It is one thing for a people to claim that all forms are God, and that all paths lead to him, and another to actually show this faith by blending their traditions into one religious expression. Having seen other examples, we are now ready to focus solely on Changu Narayan, which as we will see, is the temple of the Universal Form.

NOTES

1 *Champaka* is a sacred tree, bearing fragrant yellow flowers. The hill of Doladri is covered with *champaka* trees, and it is from this word *champaka* that Doladri Narayana receives His common name of Changu Narayana: *changu* being a derivative of *champaka*. Thus, "Changu Narayana" translates approximately as "Narayana of the *champaka* tree."

2 *Nepala-mahatmya*. Translated by Muktinath Khanal (Kathmandu: Nepala Rajakiya Prajnapratisthana,, v.s. 2028, Chapter II, vv. 1-69.) I have paraphrased from English translation by Mukunda Raj Aryal.

3 Slusser, Mary. *Nepal Mandala*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1982, p. 253, footnote 162.

4 See discussion in Alain Danielou, (*Hindu Polytheism*, Bollingen Series: NY, 1964 pp. 279-280). Although I have searched extensively, Danielou's two-page discussion of Chinnamasta is the longest I have found. This image seems to be very rare. Professor Lester informed me that the image at Changu Narayan is the only sculpted version of Chinnamasta he has ever heard of. Although Slusser notes that this is the "most important Nepalese *yogini*," she notes no other temple where this image is found.

5 Shiva (Mahadev's) divine presence as a *linga* is also found in two other smaller shrines in the courtyard. See #'s 6 and 10 of temple map.

6 Although the name Doladri is more common, the names Dolagiri and Dolashikhara (all sharing the root *dola*, "to swing") are also used. In Licchavi times, Changu Narayana was revered as Dolashikhara-svamin (Lord of the Swinging Hill).

7 In conversation, however, Robert Lester (Professor of Hindu Studies at the University of Colorado, Boulder)noted that instances occur in which myths evolve out of a name and not vice versa. The possibility of this in regards to Changu Narayan is discussed in chapter V.

8 *Op. cit., Nepala-mahatmya* Chapter 2, vv. 1-69. I have paraphrased from an English translation by Mukunda Raj Aryal.

9 See Appendix B of this paper for full interview.

10 *Satapath-Brahmana.* Translated by J. Eggeling in *Sacred Books of the East,* ed. Max Muller. Oxford: Claredon Press, 1895. V. XIV, pp. 441-447.

11 There are at least two other Indian versions of the beheaded Vishnu theme. Since they are all similar, I have only given the two more popular ones in the text. The other two come from the mythology of Hayagriva, a horse-headed incarnation of Vishnu. See: Vettam Mani, *Puranic Encyclopedia,* Motilal Banarsidas: Delhi, 1974, pp. 311-312.

12 Stella Kramrisch examines these themes of the beheaded Vishnu found in the *Satapatha-Brahmana.*in a very significant paper ('The Mahavira Vessel and the Plan Putika," *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* 95: 2 April-June, 222-235) which has bearing on the symbolism of Changu Narayana.

13 This particular quote comes from a conversation with an elder Nepali man at the temple of Pashupatinath. In translation it sounds a bit awkward, but still carries the understanding shared by many Hindu and Buddhist Nepalis.

14 *Bhagavan,* used by Hindus and Buddhists alike, is the common Nepali word for "God."

15 *Op. cit.,* Slusser, p.248.

16 Shiva is so named because it is believed he once drank a deathly poison to save the gods which turned his throat eternally blue.

17 Pratyapaditya Pal (*Vaishnava Iconology in Nepal* The Asiatic Society: Calcutta,1985, p. 17).) has suggested that the name *Budha* (being a proximity of "Buddha") Nilakantha is a direct result of this Buddhist belief. However, this is unlikely. Mukunda Aryal suggests that the word *budha* (ancient) is a fitting, yet inadequate, name of Vishnu who is so ancient he transcends time.

18 In other words, this deity named Budha Nilakantha has the iconographic traits of Vishnu; yet, the name *Nilakantha* comes from Shaivite mythology, while "Budha" is often translated as "the Buddha". This fits conveniently with the Buddhist belief that this image is really a form of Nilakantha Lokeshvar – a *boddhisattva* whose roots are found in Shaivism!

19 Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has done a great service in his *Buddha and the gospel of Buddhism* (Harper & Row: New York, 1916) by arguing against the common misunderstanding that the Buddhist and Hindu doctrines are contrary. In particular he compares the Upanishadic doctrine of the *Atman* (calling upon those passages where *Atman* or "soul" is equated with *Brahman*, the Absolute) with the Buddhist conception of *Anatta* (no-soul). He finds that the Upanishadic formula "not this, not this" compares strongly with the doctrinal beliefs embodied in the Buddhist notion of *Shunya* (emptiness) or *Anatta*, and concludes rightfully that: "There is no true opposition of Buddhism and Brahmanism (p. 220)."

20 For lack of a better word I have used "syncretism" which the *Collegiate Dictionary* defines as "1. the combination of different forms of belief or practice. 2: the fusion of two or more originally different intellectual forms." As is apparent in Nepal, Buddhism and Hinduism may have different practices, but they are both currents within the same stream of Indian thought.

21 For more on the Pashupati *linga* and Pashupata sect, see Slusser, pp. 224-232. For an interesting comparison with other *catur-* (four) and *pancha-mukhalingas*, see Diana Eck's *Banaras— City of Light (Princeton University Press:* Princeton, New Jersey, 1982. esp. pp. 100-106).

22 I refrain from saying *always* simply because in Hinduism there is always an exception, somewhere. However, I know of no other image that compares with the Pashupati *linga* in this respect. While visiting India, I told an Indian *swami* about this *linga* and he simply didn't believe me.

23 This fact, however, does not change the understanding of the Pashupata. To him, Shiva embodies all deities. The different gods emerging from the *linga* are properly called *Shivako-mukha* (faces of Shiva) because Shiva is the source form which everything emerges. Being non-Hindu, I was not allowed to to see the *linga* to verify the identity of the four faces. However, I have seen duplicates of the Pashupati *linga* in bazaars outside the temple. Mukunda Aryal verified that these duplicates are accurate.

24 *Op. cit.*, Slusser, p. 227.

25 For more on the shared traits of Shiva and Avalokiteshvara see: La Vallee, Poussin, Louis De. "Avalokiteshvara," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 2, pp. 256-261.

26 The proper name of these four-faced images is *caturmukha caitya*. They are found throughout Nepal , but usually with a simple, square base and not a *yoni*.

27 The Gorkha or Shah dynasty extends from 1769 to the present, but interrupted by loss of power for a century.

28 In the beginning, these rulers strictly enforced Hindu beliefs. It is believed that some Buddhist revolutionaries, in an act of rebellion, may have gone around the city knocking off the phallus piece and placing the Buddhist image in its stead. Today, however, this intolerance has completely faded, remaining a temporary blemish on Nepal's history of religious toleration.

29 *Op. cit.*, Pal, p. 18.

30 As the Preserver, Vishnu symbolizes the world or *samsara*.

31 Sastri, *A Descriptive Catalogue*, p. 16 copied in Nepal in A. D. 1361.

32 *Op. cit.*, Pal, p. 18

33 Translation by Shivananda, Swami (Shivananda Press: Bombay, 1983.)

34 Landon, Perceval. *Nepal*. Ratna Pustak Bhandar: Kathmandu, Nepal, 1987, p. 233.

35 Coomaraswamy (*Op. cit.*) aptly refutes this common belief. The caste system, he notes, had not even crystallized by the Buddha's time, pp. 216-218.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 214.

37 See Appendix A for Amshuvarman's seventh century Changu Narayan inscription; see also Chapter V: II, "Images in Bronze," for discussion.

38 The religious eclecticism of Licchavi kings is well documented in the *Gopal-raj vamshavali*.

39 Slusser, Mary. *Nepal Mandala*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1982; p. 253; and Mukunda Aryal.

40 The author regrets that he has no photo of this image.

41 Vajra Yogini (the Goddess of the Thunderbolt) is also a beheaded deity.

42 According to Reginald Ray (Professor of Buddhist Studies and Naropa Institute, Boulder) there is no specific reason why Samantabadhra and Vajra Yogini would be equated with Kileshvar and Chinnamasta. However, passages like the above by Asanga (which was translated for me by Dr. Ray) naturally and often lead to the

Buddhist assimilation of Hindu deities. See Dr. Ray's forthcoming *Buddhist Saints in India.*

43 See Coomaraswamy's discussion of *Trikaya* (the three bodies of the Buddha) on pp. 237-240.

Chapter Four

Vishvarupa Mandir: Architecture of the Divine

He will find that the tendency and development of Newari religious architecture is better exhibited in Changu Narayan than in any other building in the Valley...[1]

In the Vedic age, ritual was performed by the *brahmin* priest. While *mantras* were recited, oblations of *ghee* (clarified butter), honey, and other foods pleasing to the gods were offered into the *yajna* pit to be consumed by the fire-god Agni who carried them up to the heavens. In this way the man communicated with the divine. Men and women of the lower castes could speak only "second-hand" with the gods, the priest being their mediator. This indirect communication left the people unsatisfied and sometime in the early centuries B.C. the concept of ritual was redefined.[2] What evolved was the highly personal act of *puja*,which is open to all.

In the *Bhagavad Gita* (IX, 26) Lord Krishna speaks of the act of *puja* when he says, "He who offers to Me with devotion a leaf, a flower, a fruit, or water—that offering of devotion I accept from him whose heart is pure." Coinciding with the birth of *puja* came the creation of the *deva-murti* (divine image). Such images, made of stone, wood, metal, and clay were to be recipients of the devotees' offerings. They were made according to the scriptural authority of the Agamas and believed to be God Himself. Through special acts of consecration the image was sanctified, filled with the power of the deity. Thus, the divine image was not created simply as a doorway to the Godhead, not only as an image by which man could aspire to something higher—it was, in the eyes and heart of the devotee, the Highest Itself. And its purpose was, in the words of Rao, "to bring divinity down to the level of the common man and lift him up gradually to the sublime height of true divine realization."[3]

The creation of the *deva-murti* gave rise naturally to the *mandir*, (dwelling place, "temple"), as its enclosing, protective structure. In early literature the *mandir* is called the *devagriha*, or "house of god."[4] This image of the house is helpful in understanding Changu Narayan, but is not complete. A house is inanimate, separate from its occupant. To know its owner we must enter the house and meet him, for his nature is not revealed through its enshrining walls. Yet this is not the case when we gaze upon the awesome structure which enshrines the beheaded Visnnu. Symbolically, the temple complex, like

the central deity, is the embodiment of Divine Life. Each of the encircling shrines and statues, the deities and symbols adorning the central complex, are extensions of the Lord within the sanctum. They at once tell us something of the Presence within the sacred chamber, while being expressions of and one with It. Together they make up the whole of Changu Narayan, which, being far more than the *devagriha* of Vishnu, is His *Vishvarupa* or Universal Form.

As this awesome title suggests, the temple is, at least symbolically, an all-embracing structure. Its elements are many and diverse, yet contained within the whole which is the Vishvarupa Mandir. In seeking a more comprehensive understanding of the temple, the author is using several analytical approaches. Thus far, I have interwoven historical analysis and local mythology. Now the focus is turning to architectural symbolism. The concept of the *Vishvarupa*, not used by prior scholars, is being explored as an effective way of interpreting the temple symbolism. The word *vishvarupa* (universal form) suggests a reality *in* the world, yet, like the *Brahman*, this reality is ultimately a transcendent form made visible only through *kripa* (grace, "divine favor"). Similarly, the temple's form is clearly visible, yet That towards which it points is, like Shiva's fifth face, invisible and seen only by those who are blessed by the Lord.

In short, the temple symbolizes That which transcends time, yet is manifest *in time*. Because it has this temporal aspect, it seems logical to begin this discussion of architecture with an historical analysis. In Chapter II we examined the potential of an early arrival of Vaishnavism and the Licchavi kings in Nepal. It was posited that Haridattavarma, Changu Narayan's royal consecrator, reigned as much as four-hundred years earlier than the accepted date of 300 A.D. The implications of this will presently be discussed. Keep in mind, however, that while Changu Narayan's architectural style may have an origin in time, its symbolic message is of a Form that is birthless and imperishable.[5]

The Pagoda

The earliest architectural evidence of a Vaishnava temple is found at Nagari (ancient Madhyamika, India). Discovered at this site were several replicas of a stone inscription from the same period as the Heliodoros inscription (second century B. C.).[6] It is possible that at this early time the Bhagavata-Vaishnava tradition, through the Licchavi peoples, was starting to enter Nepal. The pillar inscription at Changu Narayan, establishing the

temple's construction by at least the fourth century, makes it the site of the oldest Nepalese temple. Its current architectural expression is that of a Newari [7] pagoda. If consecrated as late as the fourth century, then this Newari style is probably borrowed from other parts of Asia . If, however, as has been posited, this date is not the actual construction date, then it is possible that Changu Narayan —if it's present style resembles its original one—exhibits an architectural style indigenous to Nepal.

Origins: The pagoda temple with its multiple tiered roofs, fleshed in brick and wood,[8] is found in other regions of Asia including China, Japan, and India. There has arisen a debate as to the origin of this elegant temple style. In the seventh century A.D. the Chinese traveler Wang Hsuan-t' se came to Nepal after journeying throughout nearly all of South Asia. He recorded this reverent description of a multi-roofed building (most probably the king's palace),

> In the capital of Nepal there is a construction of storeys which is above 200 tch'eu in height and 80 pou (400 feet) in circuit. Ten thousand men can find room underneath it. It is divided into three terraces, and each terrace is divided into seven stories. In the four pavilions, there are works of sculpture to astonish you. Stones and pearls decorate them.[9]

This description is very revealing. Why would a man who had traveled from China throughout much of South Asia give so much attention to this building, unless it was something foreign to him? If the Newari pagoda had been seen in regions other than Nepal, Hsuang-t' se would not have been so intrigued. He would have been quite familiar with these structures in his home land or in nearby Tibet; he would have come across them in the plains and mountain regions of India. But this was not the case.

The work of Ronald Bernier *The Nepalese Pagoda* addresses the connection of the Nepalese pagoda with India, China, Japan and Tibet. After doing extensive, comparative work in these areas, he shows quite clearly, based on two major structural differences, that while there are some basic similarities, the style differences are too great to suggest a real foreign origin for the pagoda of Nepal. The first of these distinctions, found in other regions, but absent in all Nepalese pagodas, is construction around a central pole which serves as the cosmic as well as structural axis. The second is the means of supporting the tiered roofs. In Nepal this problem is solved by the use of multiple *tona*, wooden struts, which slant outwards from the temple building

to brace the roofs. In contrast, the Far Eastern architect uses a more complicated system of horizontal and vertical brackets to solve the weight problem.[10] From this evidence Changu Narayan appears to shine forth as being the site of not only a unique deity, but of an architectural style indigenous to Nepal. However, the account of Hsuang-t' se and the evidence of stylistic differences are not full proof. Although the Newari style is clearly different from other Asian styles, this is not proof that it did not have foreign origins. Pagoda-like structures have been found in other parts of Asia dating from the early centuries A. D. If the Nepalese pagoda is no older then the fourth century, then, it seems, the unique Newari style is but a modification of a more ancient, borrowed form. If, however, the Changu Narayan pagoda is several centuries older then commonly believed, then the pagoda style found in other regions of Asia are modifications of an architectural style originated in Nepal atop Doladri Hill.

Antiquity: The evidence of Hsuang-t' se tells us the Nepalese pagoda dates back to the seventh century. At the temple of Changu Narayan we find what might be proof of a much older origin. We have seen how the pillar inscription points, at the latest, to the year 239 A.D. as the temple's "birthdate." The present temple is a reconstruction of the early eighteenth century (1702 A. D.) and in this sense is only four-hundred years old *on the outside.*[11] However, in Nepal it is a general rule that the architect will follow the design of a previous construction. Major earthquakes often destroy the Nepalese temples and buildings leaving only the foundation. In nearly all cases the temple will be reconstructed on the old foundation. This suggests that the present Changu Narayan model is a duplicate of the original. Only one point stands in argument to this. Approaching the temple from the east one comes across a stone plinth dating from the fifth century. It is clearly the entrance way of some ancient building, perhaps, some believe, the original Changu temple. Yet the current temple is some five to six hundred feet up the hill from this plinth. Why, one can't help but ask, would the temple site be moved? and why would the inauspicious act of changing the original temple plan be committed?

The likeliness that this happened diminishes when we consider the evidence concealed within the temple's walls. Entering the temple [12] one sees that it is constructed like an onion consisting of three layers, each layer being a renovation of the previous, leaving the older one remaining to be built around. The outermost layer dates from the eighteenth century. A Hindu devotee can

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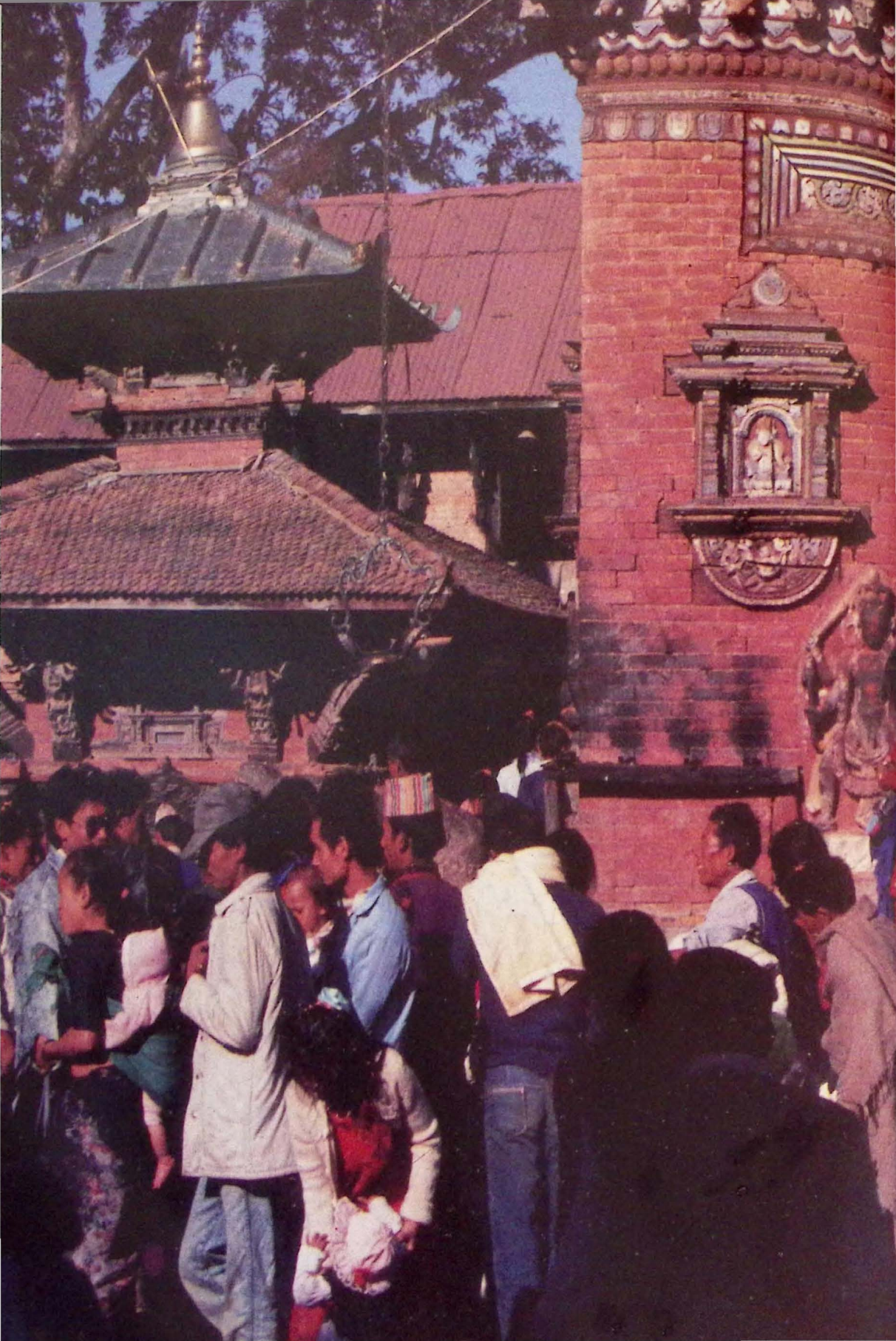

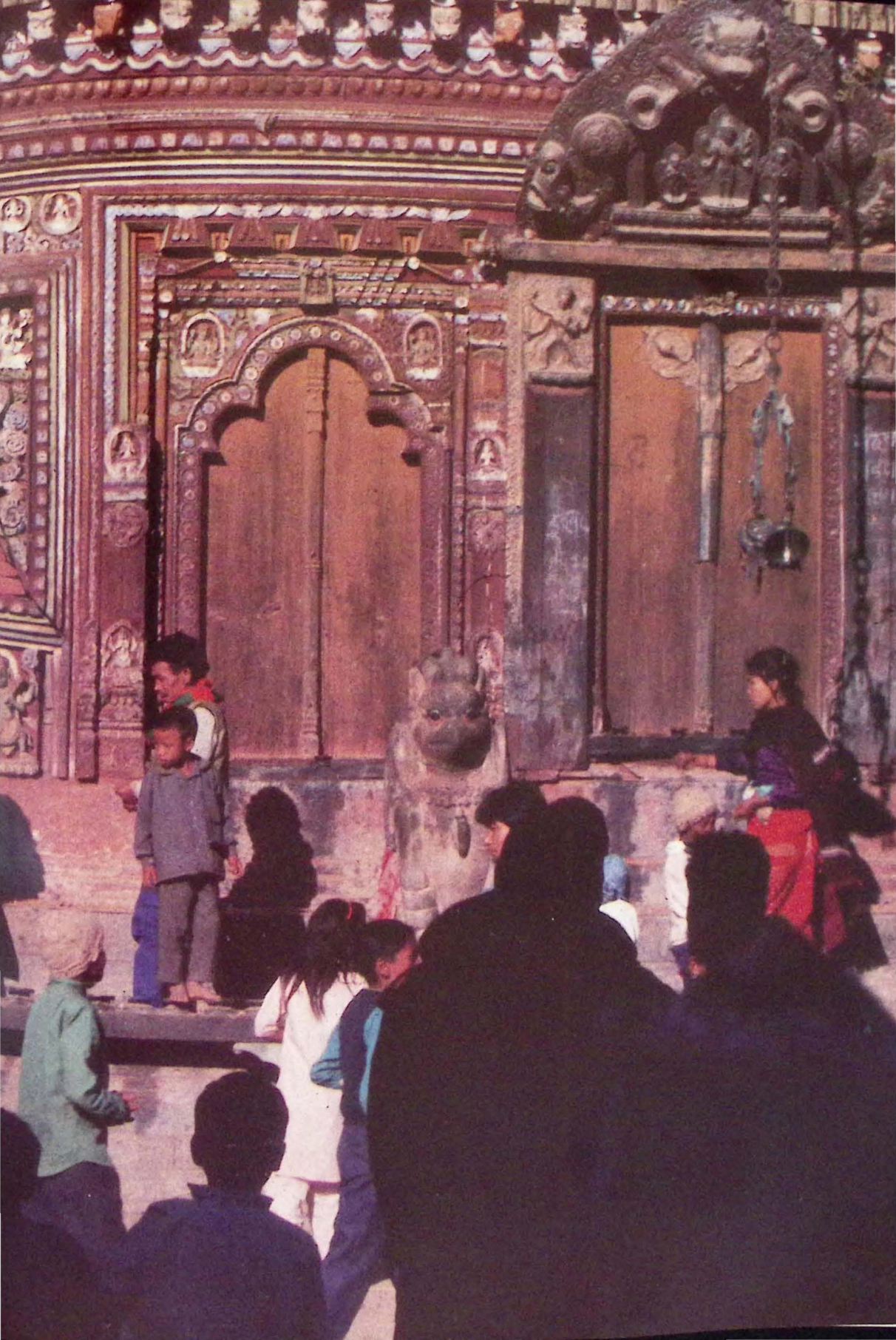

go as far as the the second layer which is believed, from inscriptional evidence, to be a renovation of the eleventh-twelfth centuries. The innermost layer, the sacred chamber, which only the priest can enter, consists of two gilded pillars with a gold canopy covering over the sacred image of Vishnu. Engraved on the canopy is an image of a cow suckling its calf, a symbol of that divine force which nourishes us all. Known as the *kamadohini* (yielding desires) this image, once popular in ancient Nepal, seems to have gone out of vogue around the seventh century, suggesting that the image was engraved before that time.[13] As only the priest can enter the inner chamber, the exact date cannot be determined. However, an early date seems quite likely. These ancient pillars, Professor Aryal theorizes, are probably the core of the original temple structure. The fact that they are firmly rooted in the earth suggests that they have not been moved from some pre-existent site.

In this light, the stone plinth seems not to be the remnant of an original, non-pagoda style.[14] Thus, there is little reason to doubt that the architects of Changu Narayan have followed the time-honored dictum of reconstructing the original design. For this reason, it is fair to assume that the second layer is most likely a copy of an earlier pagoda style, which perhaps copied an even earlier style, which at one point was the temple surrounding the still-existent sanctum. If so, there can be not doubt that the Nepalese pagoda dates back to the reign of Haridattavarma.[15]

Although hard evidence is lacking, the implications of these inner "onion" layers is intriguing. We know that by the seventh century, the Nepalese architect was capable of producing, in his unique style, magnificent seven-storey pagodas capable of housing ten-thousand men. Surely, this was the fruit of years of practice. How long had he been building simple one- and two-storey pagodas? The simple structure which at first housed Changu Narayana may have been an early step towards such a massive building. In both China and India, pagoda-like structures have been dated from the second century.[16] We have seen that 239 A.D., based on twenty-five years per royal succession, is a very modest proposal for the original construction date of our Narayana temple. The average of fifty years taken from the *Gopal-raj vamshavali* puts the date back to the first century A.D. If a date closer to the former is true, Changu Narayan stands among the oldest pagodas of India and China, having arisen in the late second, early third century. If the latter date is right, then Doladri Hill is site of the oldest pagoda in the world.[17]

This tells us something of the cultural interaction between the Licchavis and the conquered Kiratas in those early years. The Kiratas, historians believe, were the ancestors of the Valley's most prominent ethnic group, the Newars.[18] Today, it is the Newars who hold the knowledge of temple construction. The pagoda style is unquestionably attributed to them. Knowing that the Nepalese pagoda did not originate in India, that the Licchavi dynasty could not have brought this style into Nepal, Changu Narayan appears as the fruit of Licchavi religion mixing with ancient, Kirata-Newari architecture.[19] It stands as a concrete expression of Nepalese syncretism, and a perfect architectural symbol of Vishnu who, in his rise to becoming the One, became the combination of many.

Having placed the temple in historical perspective, we now turn to its architectural design to see how, as an expression of the All, the temple's form is inspired from the very universe as which it manifests.

The Mountain-Mandala: Nature's Blueprint

In a thousand ages of the gods I could not tell thee of the glories of the Himalayas [20]

Trees: Like many other architectural patterns, it seems the pagoda was the inspiration of Mother Nature (*prakriti*), the copy of Her ancient design. Two thousand years ago snow fell regularly and heavily in the Valley.[21] During this time the Nepali architect must have sought means to avoid the danger of having a heavy snowfall collapse his roof. Looking to the mountains, he might have found an example in the conifer tree whose tiered branches, extending outward as they go down from the tree's "pinnacle", allow snow to fall off gradually from one level to the next keeping the central root protected.[22] Indeed, multi- roofed shrines such as those of the Nyatapola of Bhaktapur, when seen from a distance conjure up images of such a tree, standing tall as the sacred amongst the homes of man.

Using this design would have been not only practical, but powerfully symbolic. As in many cultures around the world, in Hindu theology the tree is the world-axis, the center pole which connects heaven, earth and hell. In the Vedas this world-axis is the *Vishakayupa*.[23] This cosmic tree is the Lord's first projection into diversity. It is axis of His Universal Form. In the *Atharva-Veda* it is written:

> The Tree-Axis supports both heaven and earth,
> The Tree-Axis supports the broad atmosphere between,
> The Tree-Axis supports the six extensive directions,
> The Tree-Axis pervades this entire world.[24]

This is an early image of the *Vishvarupa*. It is the theological basis behind iconographic representations of *Vishvarupa* images, where Vishnu is depicted extending upwards and branching out like a tree into 6the many layers of reality. The tree is a symbol of *Brahman:*

> Roots raised, branches below, this is the everlasting fig tree. That is spoken of as the Pure, as *Brahman*, as the Undying. On that all worlds depend—none goes beyond that. (*Katha-Upanishad* 6, 1)[25]

The symbolism of the tree suggests that the temple is the absolute, supreme support of all. The axis of the temple runs from the central image of Narayana up to the pinnacle and beyond. The temple-axis is not physical, but implied. There is no central pole, but the entire shape of the pagoda is structured around a suggested axis. The temple structure towers ever inwards and upwards towards the pinnacle. All the forms emerge from the center, as branches extend from a tree. The root of the temple tree is Vishnu-Narayana, the Lord whose body is the universe. His divine power is the cosmic sap which gives life to all.

Mountains: If not finding inspiration in their trees, then the architect was surely captivated by the Himalayas themselves which stand like giant gods before the Valley people. For thousands of years these glorious mountains have been believed to be the homes of the gods, if not the deities themselves. It is not surprising then, that the temple, man's creation of the divine home, would be a replica of Mother Nature's awesome style. Starting with its wide base, gradually narrowing inwards and upwards in a pyramidal shape until reaching the "summit," often a gilded finial, the pagoda is quite easily pictured as a mountain in miniature. The trek to the Himalayas would have been long and difficult for the ancient Nepali, not having the modern conveniences of plane or car. Being unable to visit his beloved god's home, why would he not bring it closer by re-creating it?

Of all the great mountains none is more revered than Mount Kailasa. Arising from the Tibetan plateau some 22,028 feet into the heavens, it is a place of pilgrimage for thousands of the Hindu and Buddhist faithful. In the eyes of the Hindu it is the earthly abode of Lord Shiva. To the Buddhist it is

Kang Rinpoche, the "Precious Snow Mountain", whose circumference is marked in four places by the blessed feet of Lord Buddha. This powerful visual image, beheld yearly by hundreds of Nepalese pilgrims, is believed to be the inspiration of the crown of the Nepalese kings, the Nepali hat called *topi*, the national flag dating back to the Kirata age, and, most important to our interest, the pagoda temple.[26]

Lakes: Beside this sacred mountain is Lake Manasarovar. Spreading itself some sixty-four miles in circumference at the base of the holy mountain, it completes a natural symbol believed to be the archetype of the *mandala*, or sacred diagram. Drawn on many different surfaces and by many different means ranging from ink to grounded rock, *mandalas*, once completed, are a depiction of the cosmos itself, a universal map as it were. The central axis of the *mandala* is the mythical Mount Sumeru, the axis of the world on which the sky rests and around which the continents of the world revolve in the sea of life.[27]

After the ritualistic process of creation or "birth" a *mandala* leaves a space sanctified. It frees such a space of all demonic forces by calling forth or re-creating the universe in its primal state, a state of perfect purity. To meditate on such a *mandala* is to find this perfection within oneself. As the purpose of a temple has this as its final end, to give the devotee the experience of his innate perfection, of his oneness with the Lord, its construction is based on the *mandala* design. The temple is a reconstruction of the cosmos, a living display of the forces of the cosmic dance. It is a supreme object of meditation, for as a depiction of the universe, it is the body of the Lord.

Architectural treatises like the *Manasara-Silpashastra*, *Vastusutra-Upanishad* and *Shilpaprakasha* give guidelines for temple construction.[28] The most essential *mandala* form is square.[29] This is the *Vastupurusha-mandala* whose origins are found in the Vedic fire rituals. Before the fire ritual, or *yajna*, was performed, a *mandala* was drawn. In its center, the symbolic heart of the *mandala*, danced the fire god Agni. On each of the four sides sat a *brahmin* priest, each respectively representing one of the four Vedas. Together the Vedas are the whole of reality. In such a *mandala*, with the priests in their places chanting the sacred *mantras* and offering oblations to the fire, the cosmos was alive in its fullness.

In the Changu Narayan "mandala" we find that lord Agni has been replaced by Vishnu, the god Supreme seated atop Garuda in the heart of the temple. Around him are the four walls of the square *mandala*, and in the place

Himalayas, ancient archetype of the temple form, tower in the distance behind Bhaktapur.

THE BODY OF 'VASTU' AS FILLING THE SACRED SQUARE

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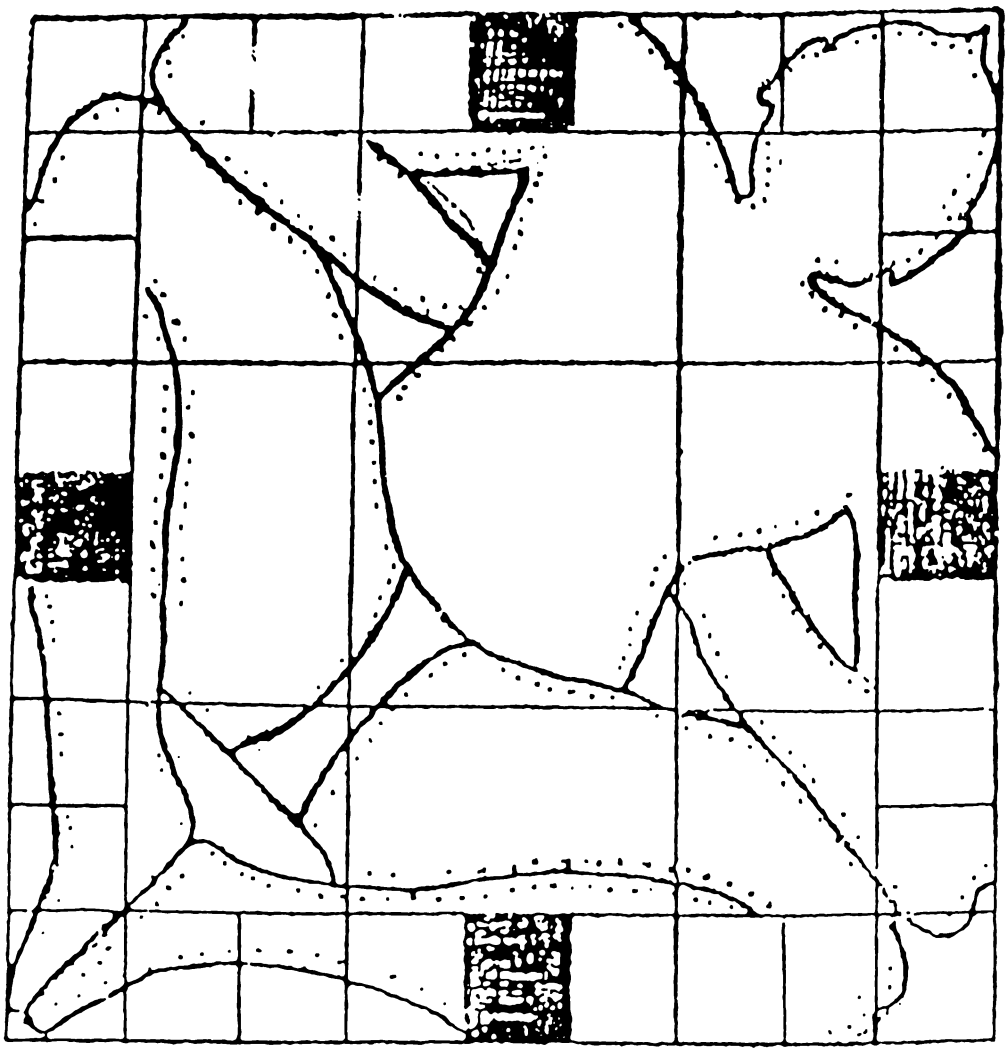

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Vishnu Mandala, ca. 1420 (earliest Newari scroll-painting known to date);
The pattern of the mandala is similar to the temple ground plan.

of the priests are four doors, common to every *mandala*, which open symbolically to the four directions, inviting in all the regions of the cosmos. The devotee coming to the temple enters the threshold of the western doorway, steps within the region of the divine *Vastupurusha-mandala*, and makes his offerings to Lord Vishnu, the supreme fire.

The Divine Body

Nearly all of Hindu philosophy is in agreement that of God's many created forms, the human body is the highest, for it is within the body that He can be known. It is not surprising then, that the temple embodies this supreme form. After a temple site has been selected and ritually purified, the groundplan is laid according to the *mandala* design. Within the larger square of the *Vastupurusha*, smaller squares are drawn, numbering eighty-one in all. The central nine are Brahma, the creator god, and those around him include the Sun and Moon, the *dikpalas*, or guardians of the directions, and various planetary divinities. Then, across every square the Mahapurusha, the Great Person, is drawn so that His body fills every part of the *mandala*, encompassing each of the deities. From this cosmic groundplan the temple arises.[30]

Once completed the devotee sees in the temple the form of his/her Lord, from the base which is His feet to the pinnacle which is His crown. "The form of the temple is the monumental embodiment of the Purusha," says the *Vishnusamhita*.[31] As the embodiment of the Supreme Person, Changu Narayan stands as a testament of the divine potential within man, standing before him as a vision, or *darshan*, of his true form. Of course, this is not to say that we really look like a pagoda temple—rather , that man, like the temple, carries within himself the Lord. In his book *The Temple and Its Significance* Niraswami Pathar writes:

> Temples serve the purpose of teaching the people who go there to offer worship on the grand principle that all that is in the cosmos can be seen in a human being. In a special sense, therefore, a human being is also the temple of God. Temples enable all people to understand this grand (idea). The temple being the symbolic representation of the body, the general pattern of its structure...correspond(s) to the various parts, principles, and secret centers in the body of a person. The temple thus *shines as a replica of the divine possibilities in man*.[32]

The Elements: Of what is the body composed; what are its various parts, principles and sacred centers? At Changu Narayan, as at many Nepalese

temples, the first answer is the five elements—earth, air, water, fire and ether. Many of the Nepalese Hindus consider themselves to be *smarta*, a name which refers to those who perform the *panchayatanapuja* to the five gods: Shiva, Vishnu, Ganesha, the Goddess, and Surya. To the *smarta* Hindu no worship is complete without the worship of these five deities. Each deity represents an element. Together they are the cosmos in its totality. At Changu Narayan *mandir*, the Vishnu temple is in the center; a temple to Shiva (as Killeshwar Mahadev) is found in the southwestern corner; shrines to Ganesha and the goddess Chinnamasta stand side by side in the southeastern part of the complex; and, in the northwestern corner, in the place of what was once a Surya shrine, now stands an image of Vishnu, thus leaving one link in the Panchayana chain missing.[33]

Despite the absence of Surya, the message of the Panchayana, of the One as many, still remains, for the Vaishnavite understands that Narayana, in His supreme aspect, comprises all the elements. According to His different forms He has different names. In the form of Shiva He is the destroyer. In the form of Surya, as Aditya Vishnu, He is the sun. As Ganesha He removes the obstacles in the devotee's life. As Chinnamasta He is Shakti, the divine power which animates this universe. Entering the temple complex, the devotee worships these five gods understanding them to be different aspects of the Lord's universal body.

Sacred Ornaments: Moving from the encircling shrines to the main temple we are presented with a magnificent and complex architectural structure whose total configuration, in the words of Bernier, "is so impressive that it can hardly be described."[34] But, indeed it should be. The temple embodies the qualities of divinity . Every curve, carved edge and dab of paint plays a part in forming "a symbol of ultimate enlightenment."[35] Nothing on the temple is purely decorative. As part of God's *Vishvarupa*, these beautiful, architectural symbols are His ornaments. They adorn the Divine Man, serving to illumine the path which leads to Him.

1) The temple doors are the gateway to the inner sanctum. For the devotee at Changu Narayan they are also his final destination. Only the priest may enter the sanctum. From the doorway the devotee offers flowers, fruits, and other gifts. He receives the Lord's *darshan* and offers Him gifts through the hands of the priest. When the temple doors are open they allows the vision of the Lord, when closed they display beautifully carved images of the *ashta matrikas* (the eight auspicious symbols). On the door frames are Ganga,

Yamuna, and Saraswati who wash away the devotee's sins, making him pure before the Lord. One may wonder why the devotee is kept outside the sacred chamber. Perhaps this is a carry-over from the Vedic age when the priest served as an intermediary. Still, the priest is a representative of the people. Symbolically, he is the devotee in a very pure state, a state the devotee must attain if he is to enter the doorway of the inner chamber of his heart.

2) The temple windows are false in the sense that they don't allow vision in or out of the temple. On one level they are simply decorative, adding beauty to the pagoda brick walls. On a deeper level they carry a very powerful message. Within each window sits a deity of the Vishnu cult. On the second floor the deity on all four sides is Vishnu. In this way the devotee can see "into" the temple and see the god within. Even more than giving the devotee a somewhat illusory view of the deity seated within, appearing in one of His countless forms, it plays with a great yogic teaching: the school of yoga often compares the human mind to a window. When it is clear the light can shine through unobstructed, when it is covered with filthy thoughts the Lord cannot be seen. The temple being the human in his highest state shows us a glimpse of the purified mind which reveals God.

3) Above the doorway is the *torana*, a semi-circular tympanum of wood. Intricately carved, the *torana* displays Vishnu as its central image and the terrific face of Garuda at its apex consuming the *nagas*, or snake gods, in his jaws. A myth from the *Mahabharata* ("Adi Parva," 30)[36] explains that:

> One day Garuda, the younger brother of Aruna, the charioteer of the sungod Surya, left his place of residence in his father's home and journeyed to where his mother was. There he learnt that she was being held in slavery by his father's other wife, Kadri, the mother of the *nagas*, and her children. The *nagas* promised to free her if the mighty Garuda would bring them the elixir of immortality *(amrita)*. Soaring to heaven, capital of the god-king Indra, Garuda successfully battled the amrita guards and obtained the elixir. Returning home he encountered Vishnu who was pleased at the bird's abstinence from tasting the divine nectar himself. For this Vishnu blessed him with eternal life and the right to be seated above Himself.[37]
>
> Humbled by the grace of the Lord, Garuda offered himself as His mount. Thereafter Garuda delivered the amrita to the *nagas* and left it on the sharp pointed kusha grass. Seeing this the *Nagas* set his mother free and began to perform special rites before drinking the nectar. While absorbed in their rites, Indra, in prior conjunction with Garuda, came and stole his nectar back. As he flew away a few drops spilt over onto the grass and the desperate snakes licked these few drops off the sharp edges of the *kusha* grass causing their tongues to be forever split.

The nectar having been taken away, the eternal quarrel between the *nagas* and Garuda began. This is seen on the *torana* at Changu Narayan which depicts the fearsome face of Garuda consuming a *naga* at each side of his mouth. In India, the *torana* face is usually that of the *Kirttimukha*(the Face of Glory), which is a depiction of the divine in its awesome and sometimes terrifying aspect. In Nepal, the *torana* design is similar except that it nearly always contains Garuda at its apex.

The "ever-moving" *nagas* are symbols of the cycles of time. Garuda (Wings of Speech)[38] represents the Vedas, that knowledge which transcends time, consuming time into itself, like offerings thrown into the fire. [39] The *torana* thus reveals the endless interplay of time and eternity which dance upon the stage of the *Vishvarupa*.

Also, like the *torana* in India, the Nepalese *torana* is a false window of sorts. Bearing the image of Vishnu as its central image, it allows vision of the deity within the sacred chamber when the doors are closed.

4) Hanging from both roofs on all sides, spread about six inches apart all the way around, small metal bells adorn the temple; and cast in iron and mounted in stone at the main entrance is a large bell weighing upwards of a ton. The smaller bells, though seldom blown strong enough by the wind, serve the purpose of pleasing Lord Vishnu with their sweet sounds. By pleasing Him, they call Him to attention, bringing Him down from His heavenly abode to hear the prayers of the people. The larger bell is rung during the times of ritual and by the devotee ,if he wishes when he comes to worship. The booming sound it makes is sure to awaken the God so He might receive the prayers which the bell has now sent off into the heavens. It is said that the sound is pleasing to the Lord and fills Him with power. Yet it should not be rung if one has nothing to offer, be it a flower or a prayer, or the God will be angered.

5) As Vishnu's symbolic crown, the pinnacle and highest structural point of Changu Narayan is its gilded finial. The finial, situated above the sanctuary, is the highest temple-point along a cosmic-axis linking the temple with the divine. This symbolism has several connotations. The pinnacle is the highest point of the *yupa* (cosmic tree). From here the central root, extending upwards towards the heavens dissolves into the formless principle. As a symbol of the divine body, the temple's central axis is the *sushumna*, the central nerve channel in which arises the *chit-shakti*, the supreme energy. When this energy reaches the crown of the head, a mortal human being

becomes both *Siddha* (perfected) and *Buddha* (enlightened). Atop images of the Buddha (the enlightened one) is the *Ushnisha*, the top knot, which is symbolic of the Buddha's enlightened state. The Buddhist temple (called *stupa*) is always crowned with an *Ushnisha*, as a symbol of the divine potential (or Buddha Nature) within all human beings.[40] This meaning also applies to the Newari pagoda. Although the pinnacle is not properly called *Ushnisha*, it is the crown of the divine body, the highest point of the Vishvarupa Mandir where form dissolves into pure consciousness.[41]

6) In Nepal the number of storeys of a pagoda temple has special significance. Depending on the specific number, different gods are symbolized. In the case of Changu Narayan, a two-storey pagoda, the first storey represents Ananta (king of the *nagas)* and the region of his seven underworlds. The second storey represents Indra (king of the *devas*) and his dominion: the seven *lokas* (worlds) extending from earth to heaven.

The relation of Indra to Vishnu is an important element in the pattern of syncretism we have seen in Vishnu's rise to supremacy. In the Vedic age, Indra was often praised; he was regarded so highly that Vishnu was but his attendant. However, when the *bhakti* cult arose with its monotheistic teaching of Vishnu as the One God, Lord Indra was soon shown his proper place, as this tale from the Puranas illustrates clearly:

> Lord Indra, the King of Heaven, was so pleased with himself that he requested the divine architect Vishvakarman to construct a palace. Soon, the palace was underway and near completion, but every time the final touches were to be added, Indra would come up with a new idea. He would imagine some way of making his palace even more splendid. This went on for years, and as time rolled on, the demands grew more and more difficult until Vishvakarman could no longer take it. He went to the supreme god Vishnu for help. Vishnu heard his plea and took pity.
>
> The next day a small boy came to Indra's door requesting to be let in. There was something about this boy: he was mysteriously beautiful, and his voice was both ancient and full of power. Baffled, the god-king asked the purpose of his visit. The boy revealed that he had known the king's father, and grand-father, and their grand-fathers reaching back to the dawn of the age. In their own time, they had each been a mighty Indra, but now, the boy noted, they were only distant memories. With these terrifying words, Indra's hair stood on end. Suddenly, a procession of ants came marching into the palace. The boy began to laugh. Turning to the king, he proclaimed that each of the ants was a former Indra. Their present incarnation, he announced, was the result of pride. Having once been mighty gods, ignorance and egotistical striving had reduced them to mere insects. Just as these words had begun to pierce the balloon of Indra's inflated ego, another apparition walked into the room. It was Lord Shiva, in the form of an ascetic. When the boy questioned the purpose of his visit, this ascetic answered that he had come to behold Indra. Pointing to a bald spot on his chest, he explained

> that with the falling of a hair, the life of an Indra was doomed to pass away. Knowing this, he had realized that his life would also one day come to an end. Thus speaking he turned to Indra and said, "That is why I devote myself exclusively to meditating on the incomparable lotus-feet of highest Vishnu. Faith in Vishnu is more than the bliss of redemption; for every joy, even the heavenly, is as fragile as a dream, and only interferes with the one-pointedness of our faith in Him Supreme." With these words both he and the boy vanished. Indra, having realized the true identity of the boy as Vishnu, was left humbled and in awe, desiring only knowledge of the Supreme.[42]

Thus did Indra learn his proper place in a universe which is but the infinite body of Lord Vishnu, beyond the comprehension of even the gods. At Changu Narayan, Indra is present symbolically as the second storey and the Lord of the upperworlds, yet he, like Ananta, is but part of the entire structure which forms the body of the Lord, symbolically and structurally.

7) In iconography Vishnu is normally depicted with emblems in hand. The pillar bearing Manadeva's inscription, and one across from it on the other side of the temple doorway, are said to serve visually and symbolically as Vishnu's arms. Atop each is one of the Lord's emblems. Crowning the former is Vishnu's discus, a symbol of the universal mind. As the mind is associated with the principle of heat or fire *(rajas-ahamkara)* the discus is also seen as the sun, thus further illustrating the importance of Aditya Vishnu in the development of the composite God, who, in His greatness, now holds the sun in his right hand. On the other pillar rests His conch, a symbol of the five elements and the origin of existence. When blown, it produces the primal sound of "Om" from which all of creation arose. Despite its awesome power, the conch is but one of Lord Vishnu's many accessories which dance together within His *Vishvarupa.*

8) In recent years the Vishvarupa has received additions not prescribed in the temple groundplans. These are the mirrors and photographs placed on the temple walls by devotees. The photographs, either of gods, kings or the devotees themselves, are an expression of devotion; they serve to identify the photographed with Changu Narayana.

It is believed that if a person with poor eyesight places a mirror on the temple so that others can see it, the donor's own vision will become stronger. For the devotee wishing to place *tika*[43] on his forehead, the donated mirror serves a very practical purpose - it helps him place the red powder in the proper place. Philosophically, it suggests to the devotee, wise in scriptural metaphors, that he should be as clear as a mirror so that when he comes to the God, the Lord's divine image will be reflected in him. Conversely, it suggests

View of Changu Narayan from the eastern end of the courtyard. At bottom left is Chinnamasta shrine. Note the gilded pinnacle of the central shrine as well as the two-storey structure.

that the devotee, coming to see the external form, should realize that he is really viewing his own, highest self.

The Womb Chamber: Having viewed each of these sacred ornaments, having been presented with the multi-forms, symbols and teachings of the Divine Body, the devotee then steps through the doorway to behold the temple's supreme message - Your beloved God is within. In the deepest, inner sanctum is Changu Narayana, enshrined within the darkened walls of the *garbha griha* (womb chamber). In its expression as a symbolic mountain, the temple is an *axis mundi* –Mount Meru amidst the sea of worlds extending out to the edges of the cosmos and beyond. The inner sanctum is a cave within this sacred mountain. It is the dark, cool cave of Mother Earth; a structural symbol of Her natural womb. As such it contains the seed of life, the *bindu,* from which creation arises. Ultimately, this seed is a formless, indivisible point. It is the unseen center of every *mandala,* the core around which they revolve, and the supreme reality towards which they point. However, the formless is always taking form. At the temple-*mandala,* the bindu is made visible through the structural form of Narayana. He is the stone embodiment of that beingless entity which gives rise to all. As one enters the sacred temple mountain, the axis of the universe, one is drawn towards its very core to see that ultimate point within the womb of divinity which gives rise to the Lord's *Vishvarupa.*

Located in the structural heart of the Divine Body, this sacred chamber serves as a powerful analogy to the human heart, which, as the seat of *Brahman-Atman,* is the greatest of all the body's secret centers, and the most holy of sancta. The act of entering the temple is thus to be accompanied by an inward turn towards the center-point of the devotee's own being. It is from within the *Atman,* the *Katha-Upanishad* (III. 3-4, 7-8) proclaims, that God, like a passenger in a chariot, observes the movements of the body, mind and senses. To know this God, who is in truth the devotee's own self, the devotee must, through devotional practices, pull the reins of the senses, bring the raging chariot of the body to a halt, and take his rightful seat within the being of the Lord.

NOTES

1 Landon, Perceval. Ratna Pustak Bhandar. Kathmandu: Nepal, 1987. p. 221

2 There were actually many coinciding elements, too difficult and numerous to be enumerated in this paper, which led to this change. I have chosen this trend because it speaks more of the people's religion as it is manifest at the temple.

3 Rao, Gopinath. *Elements of Hindu Iconograhpy* V. 1 p. 1, Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi 1985. p. 27.

4 Kramrisch, Stella. *the Hindu Temple.* University of Calcutta: Calcutta, 1946. pp. 137 – other names of the temple include, *Devagara,* (house of god); *Devalaya, Devakulam,* (seat of god); *Vimana* (measure in its parts); *Prasada* (residence of gods and kings); and *Bhavanam* (dwelling).

5 In the *Bhagavad Gita* (IV, 6) Krishna says, "I am birthless and my self imperishable.

6 "These inscriptions record the construction of " an enclosing wall [called *Narayana-vatika,* 'compound'] around...the deities Samkarshana and Vasudeva, who are unconquered and lords of all, by king Sarvatata...who is a devotee of Bhagavat." *Op. cit.,* Banerjea, p. 9.

7 The Newaris, making up the majority of the Valley populace, are believed to be the indigenous people of the Valley. Their roots are traced to the Kirata peoples. See chapter II for further discussion.

8 The technical term for the brick and wood style is "trabeate."

9 Bernier, Ronald. *The Temples of Nepal.* S. Chand & Co.: New, Delhi, 1978; pp. 4-5.

10 Bernier, Ronald. *The Nepalese Pagoda.* S. Chand & Co.: New Delhi, 1979; Chapter VIII.

11 See Appendix B.

12 Something which the author, being a foreigner, was not allowed to do.

13 This is according to Mukunda Aryal; knowledge of this image is rare amongst scholars. Ronald Bernier (Professor of Art History at the University of Colorado, Boulder) has suggested to me that the *kamadohini* is a symbol of Krishna. A common epithet of Krishna is Gopal, "the lord of the cows." Bernier cites a cave in Mahallapurana, India where the *kamadohini* image is part of a Krishna scene.

14 Perhaps it was the shrine of another deity which was destroyed when Haridattavarma came to Doladri to enshrine Changu Narayana.

15 As was discussed in chapter I, the dates of Haridattavarma is open to speculation. While most scholars say his reign began in the fourth century, I have presented evidence that suggests a date somewhere between 96 A. D. and, at the latest, 239 A. D.

16 See *The Nepalese Pagoda*, "Questions of Origin."

17 According to Ronald Bernier, this would make Changu Narayan a contemporary of the legendary 13-storey, iron steel pagoda believed to have stood in the 2nd century in the Gandhara region of India (now Pakistan). Today, all that remains of this fabled temple is its foundation. Interview with Professor Bernier on 3/1/90.

18 See introduction to Netra Thappa's *Short History of Nepa l*(Ratna Pustak Bhandar: Kathmandu, 1981).

19 See discussion in Mary Slusser's *Nepal Mandala* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1982) on Kirata-Newari relations, pp. 9-12.

20 Aran, Lydia. *The Art of Nepal.* Sahayogi Prakasha: Kathmandu, 1978; quoted from the Puranas.

21 Today snow falls as regularly as the ice atop Mt. Everest drips – never.

22 Another quality of this tree is that its sloping limbs place the snow close to its own roots, not sending it off into the realm of another tree's property, as if to say, "I don't want this snow on me, but I won't make you deal with it either." Even today, ludicrous though it may be, there is a law in the Kathmandu Valley which states that snow from one's home or temple must not fall on another's property. Like the conifer the pagoda temple leaves fallen snow well within one's property keeping everyone free of breaking the law.

23 See T. S. Maxwell's discussion in *Vishvarupa.* (Oxford University Press: Delhi, 1988), pp. 33, and 155-171.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 158.

25 Ibid., p. 171.

26 *Op. cit., Nepalese Pagoda* p. 119.

27 For further discussion on *mandalas* see: Giuseppe, Tucci, *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala.*

28 The *Vastusutra-Upanishad* is translated by Alice Boner (Motilal Banarsidas: Varanasi; 1982); the *Manasara-Shilpashastra* by Prasanna Acharya (Indian Architecture, Manasara Series: Vol II, 1981); And Kramrisch's *Hindu Temple* has partial translations of these and other architectural texts.

29 *Op. cit.*, Kramrisch, "the Plan," p. 21-63.

30 This is elaborately discussed in Kramrisch's section on "the Plan." Although her examples are from Indian temples, the Newari pagoda follows the same *mandala* design. This was verified during conversations with Ronald Bernier and Mukunda Aryal. Mr. Aryal showed me a Nepalese architectural manuscript from 1600 A. D. which discussed and illustrated temple design.

31 *Op. cit.*, Kramrisch, p. 360.

32 Pathar, Viraswami. *The Temple and Its Significance.* Sri Vani Vilas Press: Tiruchi, 1974; pp. 2-3.

33 The construction of the *Panchayana* was at one time strictly adhered to in Nepal. After the early 20th century strict temple construction rules were ignored and when certain images were destroyed or naturally decayed, they were replaced with, in some cases, a different god.

34 *Op. cit., Temples of Nepal* p. 152. Professor Bernier uses the poetic term "veil or ornament" to describe the decorative Newari style.

35 Michell, George. *The Hindu Temple.* Harper & Row, New York 1977 p. 49.

36 See Vettam Mani's translation in *Puranic Encyclopedia,* (Motilal Barsidas: Patna, 1974) pp. 281-284. See also: *Op. cit.*, Slusser, p. 252.

37 An image portrayed at many Narayana temples where Garuda is sculpted atop a stone pillar several feet higher than his Master.

38 The name Garuda comes from the root *gṛ*, "to speak." See Monier-Williams.

39 "The triple Veda, said to be a bird, carries Vishnu, the lord of sacrifice." *Matsya Purana* (256).

40 See Chri Olschak's *Mystic Art of Ancient Tibet.* McGraw-Hill: New York, 1973.

41 The Hindu parallel to the *Ushnisha* is the *sahasrar*, or thousand petaled lotus. Although I have found no reference that says the pinnacle equates to the *sahasrar*, I am sure this meaning is implied, if not to the common man, at least to the adept *yogi*.

42 Zimmer, Heinrich. *Myths and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization.* Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1972; p. 9.

43 Made of tumeric and water, the *tika* is ritually place on the forehead as a symbol of devotion.

Chapter Five

Sculptural Art: Multiple Forms of the One

The carvings—stone, copper, and wood alike—are older and more profuse than on the walls, doors, struts, and brackets of any other shrine, and of its spiritual authority there is no question...[1]

With figures in stone, bronze/copper and wood dating from as early as the first/second century A. D. through to the nineteenth century, Changu Narayan stands as a living museum, a brilliant display of the historic development of Nepalese religion and art. Many times the victim of earthquake and fire damage, the temple itself was restored during the lifetime of Ganga Rani, the consort of King Shiva Simbha Malla (1585-1644). Then in 1702 A. D. it was again burned and again reconstructed. In 1708 A. D. King Bhaskara Malla added copper plated inscriptions and numerous other additions have been made to the temple during the last two centuries including a new coat of paint given in recent years. Despite the constant damage inflicted by Nature Herself, the third century *murti* within the *garbha griha* and several stone images in the courtyard remain in excellent condition. Each of these beautiful works, although unique and varied in form, are expressions of Vishnu. They make manifest His invisible and infinite being.

This chapter will treat the three types of images found in Changu Narayana separately, beginning with those crafted in stone. There are over fourteen stone images in the courtyard. Only the central image of Chinnamasta and Changu Narayana, enshrined by the central complex, is closed to the western viewer. All others are free standing in the courtyard, in clear view of those many devotees, scholars, and tourists who come to the temple. In the following pages the major sculptures will be analyzed. Although noted for each image, dates are not the chief concern in this chapter. In examining these sculptures, emphasis is placed on seeing in what ways their symbolic meaning, as it is embodied in myth and theology, illumines our understanding of the Vishvarupa Mandir. What will be found is that each of the sculpted images, be their medium in stone, metal, or wood, expresses powerfully the Vishvarupa theme. Each suggests a reality which though multiple in its shapes and forms, is single in its essence. Some of these images stand as an aspect of this reality, as one example of the many forms the Lord can take. Other amazing sculptures present to us the supreme reality in

totality. These serve as sculptural depictions of that which cannot be depicted. They make visible that *Brahman* who is not seen by physical eyes. The vision they reveal to us, though stupefying our rational mind, is of a world of infinite plurality, united within a single essence. This universe, they tell us, is the form of the One Lord.

Pancharatra-Agama

The Changu Narayan sculptures are properly studied within the context of an ancient theological and artistic system developed in the *Pancharatra-Agama*.[2] In the *Satapatha-Brahmana* (XIII, 6, 1, 1) Purusha-Narayana, desiring to "be this All" holds a sacrificial rite over the period of five (*pancha*) seasons (*ratra*), indicating that the development of the Agama has its origins in an early sacrificial cult of Narayana. By the second century A. D. these texts had been thoroughly developed by the Bhagavatas. The word *agama* refers to a set of texts of divine origin, and to the Bhagavatas, the *Pancharatra-Agama* is the exposition of Lord Vishnu Himself. It is called the *muladeva* (the crown-jewel of the Upanishads) and is revered as the holy teaching from Vishnu passed down through the ages from one enlightened *rishi* to the next. As such the *Agama* is superior to the Veda. It is the root of the tree of divine knowledge of which the latter is believed to be only the trunk and branches.

Para: In a scientific manner, the *Pancharatra-Agama* elaborates the theme of the One become Many. This system offers a five-fold division of the Lord into which falls each of Changu Narayan's images .. The first division, if it can properly be called a division, is the *para* (lit. highest) or supreme aspect of Lord Vishnu-Narayana. In this form, the Lord is equatable with *Brahman* and the Buddhist *Dharma-kaya*. This is the "ultimate resting place of all (*vishvasya param nidhanam*)"[3] from which everything emerges and into which all dissolves. It is from the Lord's *para* form that His other four aspects evolve. At Changu Narayan there are seven stone sculptures of the *para* form.

Vyuha: From His *para* aspect the Lord emerges as *vyuha*. *Vyuha* is the Narayana's power to emanate, divide, extend and multiply His supreme form. The *vyuhas* are the first emanations during the process of cosmogenesis. They are the divine qualities of the Lord which shape the universe. In the Pancharatra system there are twenty-four principal *vyuhas*, each being an aspect of the Lord and inseparable from Him. There are two stone sculptures of a *vyuha* form in the courtyard. On the wooden struts which encircle the central Changu Narayana shrine, all twenty-four appear.

Vibhava: The Lord's *vibhava* aspect is His power to incarnate. It is through His *vibhava*, that Narayana, though the Supreme Being, can appear on earth as a human being. His specific incarnations are called the *avatars*. The scriptures say that there have been an infinite number of *avatars*, but ten are most important. Each of these ten supreme avatars *(Dashavatar)* is sculpted on the temples struts, while two stone masterpieces in the courtyard also reveal this theme.

Antaryamin: After emanating out of Himself, the Supreme Being not only enters the universe as an avatar, He also "dwells in the hearts of all" as the *antaryamin* or inner dweller.[4] This aspect of Narayana cannot be sculpted because it is the formless divinity within all beings. It is equivalent to the Lord's *para* aspect in the same way that the *Atman* or inner soul is one with the *Brahman*. Although this aspect is not found in sculpture, its symbolic message is clearly portrayed at the temple. As the temple is the Supreme Person, its inner sanctum or "heart," is the dwelling of the *antaryamin*.

Archa: The fifth aspect of Vishnu-Narayana according to the *Pancharatra-Agama* is *archa*. *Archa* means image or embodiment. The *archa* aspect cannot *be* sculpted because it *is* sculpture. *Archa* is the Lord's power to be revealed in physical form. All statues, paintings, and carvings are manifestations of the Lord's *archa* aspect. It is through His power of *archa* that the Lord's *para-antaryamin, vibhava,* and *vyuha* aspects can be depicted at Changu Narayan. Now, we will look at the specific examples of Narayan's five aspects, beginning with *archa* in stone.

A. *ARCHA* IN STONE

Vibhava

Vishnu's vibhava aspect is His capacity to incarnate, to take the form of an *avatar*. The Hindu scriptures speak of countless *avatars* but ultimately ten of these reign supreme: the celebrated *Dashavatars*. The elements within the Pancharatra *vibhava* system are numerous and to go in depth one could write volumes,[5] yet the essence is simple and is captured in the Upanishadic verse, "Having created it, he entered it."[6] The *avatar* theory shows us that God is not some detached principle beyond the sphere of the created world, but that He exists amongst us, as us, and for us. "Just as from an inexhaustible lake thousands of streams flow on all sides, so also from the Remover-of Sorrow (*Hari*), sum of all reality, comes forth countless incarnations. The seers, the

lawgivers, the gods, the human races, the lords of progeny, all are parts of Him."[7]

Although the Lord is everything, He can, through His infinite power, manifest as a particular, very special entity for the uplift of the world. He does so because He Himself has veiled us with His *maya*,[8] His cosmic power of illusion, and we are thus blind to our true identity as the Godhead. In our ignorance we are susceptible to the forces of evil, and in constant need of the Lord's grace. In the form of the *avatar* this grace is given. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Vishnu, in the form of the Krishna *avatar*, says: "Whenever *dharma* declines and *adharma* [evil] prevails, I become manifest from age to age to save the good, destroy evil and to re-establish *dharma* (IV, 7)."

In Nepal the king himself is considered to be an *avatar* of Vishnu. Each successive king takes on the status of being not only a political monarch, but a divine incarnation, attesting to the importance of this theme in Nepalese tradition.[9] The life of each *avatar* provides bedtime reading for most Nepali children. If not learnt in this way, the tales are discovered through comic books, movies, radio, and even at school. The underlying morals of each myth become a guideline for life; a teaching to be remembered and practiced each day. Although each *avatar* has come and gone, in a very special way they are believed to still be present among us. They can be prayed to and they will bestow their blessings. In the form of statues and paintings they give the people *darshan*, vision of the divine.

To have the *darshan* of just one *avatar* is considered a very auspicious event, sure to bring good fortune to ones' life. Each of Vishnu's ten supreme incarnations, the *Dashavatars*, is present at Changu Narayan bestowing blessings upon the people. Of these, two can be seen in the courtyard magnificently sculpted in stone, while each of them appears on at least one of the temple's forty wooden struts. To understand these stone images we must place them in the context of the *Dashavatars*. For this reason we will look at each of the *avatars*. Those sculpted in stone are noted as such; otherwise the reader can assume that the *avatar* is carved in wood. We will examine the *Dashavatars* chronologically, that is in the order that they appeared on earth.

1) Matsya: The first of all of Vishnu's incarnations was the Matsya or fish *avatar*. At the end of the previous cycle of Time, Manu, the first man and founder of mankind, was making water ablutions to Lord Vishnu. In the water was a fish who said to him, "I shall save you from a flood which will sweep away all creatures." The fish grew to a size at which only the ocean

could hold it. Manu realized the fish to be Vishnu. The God told Manu that the entire world was going to be covered by the cosmic waters. The present cycle of creation had ended. It was time to begin the endless process of creation and destruction anew. Vishnu directed Manu to build a ship and place on it all the sages, plants and animals. During the deluge Vishnu kept the ship safe. He also fought a demon who had stolen the Vedas. He gave the Vedas to Manu and taught him the principles of truth which were to be our guide during the present cycle of four *yugas*. It is interesting to note that when this story was told in the Vedas it was credited to Brahma or Prajapati, the Original Being.

2) **Kurma:** At the beginning of creation the gods were losing their power over the demons. Turning to Vishnu for help they were advised to churn the sea of milk that would produce the nectar of life, *amrita*, making them invincible. Further, the Lord promised that He would become the tortoise Kurma on which the mountain Mandara, as the churning stick, would rest. With the evil *asuras* on one side and the gods on the other, the sea of milk was churned and the sacred *amrita* produced. The Puranas tell us that Vishnu not only became the support of Mount Mandara, but, "the holder of the mace and discus (Vishnu) was [also] present in other forms amongst the gods and demons."[10] In the form of Krishna He was the leader of the gods, while in another "vast body" He sat upon the summit of the mountain. With His energy He sustained the serpent king Vasuki (the churning rope), and filled the gods with strength. And when the amrita was produced He kept it free from the hands of the demons. In this way the omnipotent Lord took all forms necessary to overcome evil, His primary form being that of the tortoise or kurma.

It is said that when the churning first began the first thing that arose was a lethal poison which would have destroyed the world had Shiva not voluntarily swallowed it. As the churning continued, however, divine gifts arose: a white elephant; precious gems; Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth and fortune; and finally a beaker of *amrita*. Thus it is seen as an analogy for *sadhana, the* process of spiritual practice and purification which leads to *moksha* (liberation).. When the mind is churned through the practices of devotion, toxic thoughts and poisonous emotions may first be brought to the surface as the mind is cleansed of its impurities. But these thoughts do not harm the devotee because the Lord, in this case in the form of Shiva, is there to consume

them. The poison purged, what begins to arise are the inner treasures of divinity.[11]

No early representation of this *avatar* is known. At Changu Narayan the Kurma *avatar* is carved (in wood) with a human body and tortoise head in a style typical to eighteenth-century Nepal. In the *Satapatha-brahmana* this *avatar* was originally associated with Varuna, the lord of the waters, and in other parts of the Veda the tortoise was said to be a form of Prajapati. But as the Vaishnava cult developed, this god, like many others, was seen as just another name for Vishnu, the Lord Supreme.

3) **Varaha:** Vishnu came a third time in the form of a mighty boar, Varaha Avatar. Like the two preceding, this *avatar* was at one time said to be a form of Brahma. However, the *Vishnu Purana* explains that it was really Vishnu *in the form* of Brahma (Prajapati). "At the close of the last age the divine Brahma awoke from his night of sleep and beheld the universal void. He, the supreme Narayana (Vishnu),.... invested with the form of *Brahman*, concluding that within the waters lay the earth, and being desirous to raise it up, created another for that purpose."[12] Taking the form of a boar, Vishnu dove into the ocean and killed the demon Hiranyaksha (Golden-eyed) who was holding the earth (the goddess Bhuvani) at the bottom of the sea. In the Vedas we find that when Prajapati had raised the earth He then became Vishvakarman (the universal architect)[13], whereby "he planned her."[14] Popular in both India with the Gupta rulers and the Licchavi kings of Nepal for its theme of strength and the overcoming of captors, this incarnation is one of the most important *vibhava* forms. Several sixth century, stone sculptures of Varaha are found throughout the Valley. Although not sculpted in stone, this form is found among the struts.

In mythologies around the world the boar is symbolic of fertility, and the folklore and literature of ancient India and Nepal is no exception.[15] The *Atharva-Veda* reads, "bearing the fool, bearer of what is heavy, patiently enduring the settling down of the excellent and of the evil, the earth, in concord with the boar, opens itself to the wild pig."[16] In later Puranic literature the boar is referred to as *Yajna-varaha* and is said to be a symbol of the fire sacrifice.

As He rescued the earth, Vishnu, in later tradition, is often depicted with the goddess as His consort. It is a match deemed to be eternal; lifting the earth from the clutches of the demon, Varaha declares, "In every age, I carry you this way."[17] With these words, the *avatar* refers to the infinite cycles of

time in which no action can be done which has not been enacted countless times before.

4) Vamana: In 464 A. D. King Manadeva had two stone sculptures of Vamana *avatar*, the dwarf incarnation, erected in honor of his mother. A beautiful copy of these sculptures, dating from the eighth century, is found in the courtyard at Changu Narayan. The myth on which this image is based has its seeds in the Vedic description of Vishnu as the "three strider":

> Bali, the king of the demons (and grandson of Prahlada) had, through penance, obtained the power to rule the three worlds. Turning to Vishnu the gods sought help. Always coming to the aid of those who call His sacred name, Vishnu took form as the priestly dwarf, Vamana, the son of Aditi (Primordial Vastness), mother of the twelve Vedic *adityas*. Appearing before Bali, the Lord Become Midget requested that He might be given as much land as can be covered by three steps. With a mocking smile, Bali granted His wish. At that the dwarf grew to enormous proportions, assuming the divine form of Vishnu and proceeded to take one step over the earthly realm, a second step across the heavens and then, no space being left for the promised third step, placed His foot on the head of the humbled Bali and pushed him down to the nether worlds where he could be rightful king of the infernal regions.

As often happens with man, Bali had become blinded by his own power, and ignorantly believed himself to be the sovereign of the universe. In a rather dramatic way Vishnu enlightened him as to who was the true Lord.

The Vamana *avatar* was popular in ancient Nepal as a symbol of wisdom. Having outwitted the demon king, Vishnu was able to reclaim the universe by simply taking three steps. In the image at Changu Narayan we can see the dwarf being granted his wish and then his transformation into Vishnu in His Vishvarupa or Universal Form. In this form He is the cosmic being striding across and encompassing all the worlds. Although He appears as a dwarf, Vishnu's true form is infinite.

The Vamana *avatar* is the obvious choice of a conqueror devoted to Lord Vishnu. From a pillar inscription in the Indian city of Allahabad we know that Nepal was a frontier state of the Gupta empire.[18] As such Nepal would have to pay tribute to the emperor, and the Nepali king along with many others, had to be present at important ceremonies. While in the pillar inscription Manadeva merely recalls his predecessors and makes no mention of the extent and power of the kingdom, on the Vamana inscription he boasts often and proudly of his own conquests and clearly asserts his independent status. Thus, it is possible that Manadeva overthrew the Gupta rule and celebrated his role of a conqueror by installing an image of Vamana.

The scriptures say that he who sacrifices in the name of Vishnu identifies himself with the God and his fruit is thus the world for, "in that he strides the god's strides, the sacrificer, becoming Vishnu, wins these worlds."[19] It is also said that these three strides overcome hostility, slay rivals, destroy enemies, and kill the malignant one. The *Atharva-Veda* contains many formulae stressing the idea of conquest in association with Vishnu's three strides, for the one who made Vishnu's strides was victorious against his enemies: "Vishnu's stride art thou, rival slaying, from earth we exclude him who hates us, whom we hate; let him not live, let breath go away from him."[20] It is also interesting that during the ceremony of royal consecration the "rite of the strides" was performed in order to endow the sacrificer with the powers inherent in kingship.

In the *Rig-Veda* Vishnu's striding is called *narya* (manly, heroic).[21] Thus, as a warrior and king, Manadeva identified himself with this aspect of his all-encompassing Lord. In doing so he may have been following a tradition established by the Indian Guptas who were also inspired by the heroism of Vishnu, depicting it often in their art.

5) Narasinha: Dating from the eleventh century, engraved near the base of the Kileshvar temple, is a stone sculpture of Narasinha. It is one of the earliest representations of this *avatar* in Nepal. Popular among Nepalese kings as a symbol of strength, the myth surrounding this incarnation goes something like this:

> Young Prahlada was the son of the evil king, Hiranyakashipu. He was a devout worshiper of Vishnu and because of this Hiranyakashipu decided to kill him. However, his attempts were futile, the boy being miraculously protected by his Lord. Hiranyakashipu (the brother of Hiranyaksha, slain by Vishnu in his previous incarnation) was invulnerable. He had received a boon from Brahma which made it impossible for him to be killed by day or by night, by god, man or beast, inside or outside his palace. Thus, Vishnu, to save his beloved devotee, appeared at twilight (neither day nor night) as a lion-headed man (neither man nor beast) within a pillar (neither inside nor outside the palace) and with His mighty claws tore out the entrails of the demon.

In this tale we find the oft-repeated theme in Hindu mythology of the Lord's love and protective care for His devotee. It also declares brilliantly that for the Lord there are no limitations. He can be bound in no way. He is the doer of things deemed impossible. In the carving at Changu Narayan we see that as Narasinha rips the chest of the demon, Garuda and Shri Lakshmi stand

to his right, the devotee Prahlada to his left, and from the heavens above Brahma, Indra and Shiva are watching the great deed. Below in the underworld two *nagas* are seen with folded hands for as Shesha, the king of the *nagas,* is Vishnu's vehicle, all *nagas* are His devotees.

6) Parashurama: With the coming of the sixth *avatar,* God had climbed the evolutionary ladder. Having first appeared as a fish, he then took form as a reptile, then moved up to a mammal, to a half-man half-lion, then to a dwarfed (perhaps Neanderthal?) man and finally to His form as Parashurama, "Rama with the axe" where He came in full human form. This *avatar* came to prevent the *kshatriya* or warrior caste from overthrowing the *brahmins* and becoming the rulers of Hindu society.[22] Around 3000-2000 B. C. the northern Aryan tribes began a gradual takeover of the native Dravidian peoples of India. Some historians believe that the Parashurama myth tells of the final defeat of the non-Aryan kingdoms and their kings. It is said that single-handedly Parashurama destroyed all the males of royal blood. Twenty-one times he rid the earth of the warrior class, leaving but a few noble men to perpetuate the race.

By trying to overcome the priestly caste, the *kshatriyas* were disobeying their *dharma.* Thus, it was necessary for Vishnu to incarnate and establish the Law. In Nepal this incarnation did not gain much popularity, and is shown mostly in paintings of the *Dashavatars* and never alone.

7) Rama: After Parashurama had destroyed the kshatriya race and re-established the *dharma,* having completed his reason for being, he passed on his power to the seventh incarnation, Ramachandra, and retired to the mountains to meditate. Ramachandra or simply Rama, "the embodiment of *dharma,*" was an incarnation of Aditya Vishnu, the solar aspect of Vishnu. The tale of Rama is found in the *Ramayana,* written by the sage Valmiki, the proclaimed "father of epic poetry." It is a tale which, like that of Parashurama, deals with the Aryan conquest of India. Rama was king of Ayodhya. During his rule he re-established a golden age (*Sat Yuga*) of justice and happiness. The expression "Rama-rajya" (the kingdom of Rama) is even today synonymous with peace and prosperity. During the time of his princehood, Rama was exiled in the forest and led an expedition to Ceylon to rescue his wife Sita, who had been captured by the demon-king Ravana. His slaying of the demon king (granting the demon instant liberation) is said to have been Vishnu's main purpose for incarnating as Rama. Again, at Changu Narayan, this *avatar* can be seen in one of the beautiful struts.

The cult of devotion to Rama is one of the most prevalent in India. Rama's great helper and devotee, the monkey-headed demigod Hanuman is widely accepted as the symbol of devotion *par excellence*. In Nepal, while painting and statues of Rama are rare, Hanuman's beatific image is to be found in many places as the symbol of supreme devotion.

Examination of the symbolism of Sita, Rama's wife, brings another very important element of the Vaishnava cult into play. It is the element of *shakti*, or the female aspect of the Lord. Sita is the incarnation of Lakshmi, the beloved wife of Lord Vishnu. Vishnu without Lakshmi is like an animal without blood. She is His creative power. Together they are the inseparable halves of the One.

8 a.) Krishna: In the form of Krishna (the Dark One) Vishnu manifested as the embodiment of that divine love which destroys all pain. It is said that in each of His incarnations, Vishnu fulfills the work of the previous ones. And thus we are told that once, while Rama was wandering through the forest, the power of his beauty awoke the sages from their meditations. They were captivated by his beauty and longed to be united with him. Rama told them that even if they were women he could not make love to them because of his loyalty to Sita. However, he said that in his next incarnation he would come as Lord Krishna and they as *gopis*, and in these forms they would unite.

Krishna came to establish the religion of *bhakti* as a medicine for the present Age-of-Strife (*Kali Yuga*). He was the son of Devaki, sister of the cruel demonic King Kamsa. A heavenly sage, Narada by name, predicted the slaying of the king by the king's nephew. So, Kamsa locked Devaki up and killed her first six children. However, the seventh, Balarama, escaped, and the eighth, Lord Krishna, was secretly exchanged for the daughter of a cowherd woman. He grew up as a cowherd boy playing the flute and, in fulfillment of his promise, seduced the cowherd women. Even as a child, He killed many monsters and demons. Upon reaching manhood he fulfilled the prophesy and killed Kamsa, becoming lord of the kingdom.

As was discussed before, Krishna, like Rama, is believed to have been an historical figure. The Bhagavata school believed Him to be a complete manifestation of divinity. His association with Vishnu was a key factor in the development of the Vaishnava cult. Today, Krishna alone is considered a perfect incarnation of Vishnu and given all the attributes of the Supreme.

Krishna' courting with the cowherd girls, in particular with Radha (Success), is seen as symbolic of the eternal love-dance between the Lord and

the Goddess whose union brings forth the seed of creation. This theme has been developed fully in the Tantra cult and will be expounded in a later chapter.

At Changu Narayan, Krishna's beloved form is manifold. Among the struts he is seen playing his flute. In the northwest corner of the courtyard stands a small stone temple where his enshrined image is worshiped daily. And in a magnificent sculpture known as the *Vishvarupa*, Krishna is depicted in his Universal Form. The statue, however, falls under the category of *vibhuti* and will be discussed shortly.

8 b.) **Balarama**, "Rama the Strong," the elder brother of Krishna, is considered the eighth *avatar* when Krishna is taken as a full manifestation of Vishnu. Otherwise, they are both considered partial incarnations. The *Vishnu Purana* relates that Krishna and Balarama arose from two of the hairs of Vishnu, which He plucked and sent drifting from His heavenly abode down to Earth.

Balarama grew up with Krishna and assisted Him in killing many demons, including King Kamsa. That Balarama would play the role of helper is quite natural; in certain texts he is said to be the incarnation of Ananta, "Endless" (or Shesha, "Remainder"), Vishnu's snake-vehicle, made manifest in human form to help his Master fight the evil forces on earth. It is said that during the deluge, when the universe is destroyed, Vishnu lies in His cosmic sleep atop the serpent Shesha and drifts eternally peaceful atop the waters of creative potential. Shesha is the animal counterpart of the Lord and at the same time no different from Him. After Balarama had completed his earthly mission he wandered to the ocean side where he stopped under a tree to meditate. While absorbed in the inner truth, Balarama died; as his body began to hunch over, Ananta, Balarama's true nature, emerged from his mouth and slithered towards the sea to be immersed in the waters of the abyss.

At Changu Narayan, Balarama is shown both in human form on one of the struts, and, carved in stone, in snake form as Ananta, lying beneath the cosmic form of Krishna in the celebrated Vishvarupa statue.

9) **Gautama Buddha** is believed by many to be Vishnu's ninth incarnation. As an historical figure Buddha caused much strife for the believers of the Vedic tradition. His teachings denied the existence of God and turned many people away from the ways of the Hindu caste-oriented life. Some say that his being included as an *avatar* was a result of necessity and not truth. How could someone so powerful and with so many followers not be an incarnation?[23] So,

these scholars say, the Puranic writers cleverly described the Buddha as one who came to mislead the enemies of the gods, demons and those of low birth whose proficiency in sacred knowledge was a threat to the gods' supremacy. Thus, he was a divine deceiver of sorts, a form of Vishnu, they say, incarnated for the purpose of hastening the ruin which must mark the end of the present age, making way for the rebirth of a pristine world.

However, in light of the Valley syncretism, this theory seems to have little foundation. The process of assimilation is common to both traditions. We have seen many examples where a Hidnu deity is given a Buddhist name. Here is an example where the Buddha is assimilated as a Hndu form. In Nepal there is no sense of the Buddha as an arch-deceiver. During an interview, the Changu Narayan priest said, "Buddhism is a branch of Hinduism. We accept it... same God, only different name."[24] This viewpoinnt is common throughout Nepal. Here, Buddhist and Hindus worship together. The names may be different, but the forms and principles are the same.

10) The tenth *avatar*, Kalki, is yet to come. He will hail the end of the *Kali Yuga* riding upon a white horse, holding a sword and blazing like a comet. Not unlike the Christian armaggedon myth, the Puranas say that Kalki will reestablish *Sat Yuga* (the Age of Truth), punish the evildoers, console the virtuous, and then destroy the world. At this point Vishnu in the form of the sun (Aditya Vishnu) will give off so much heat that the world will dry up and wither away. In the form of wind, the cosmic life-breath (*prana*), He will remove Himself from all creatures. Finally, in the form of a great cloud, Vishnu will shed a rain, like nectar, which will quench the Earth and give it its ultimate relief, final extinction or *Nirvana*. Under the mighty torrent of rain the Earth will be taken back into the primal ocean from which Vishnu as the Boar once brought it forth. Everything will dissolve into this ocean and Vishnu will sleep atop the watery expanse of His own being. Like a spider he will have drawn into Himself the web of creation.[25]

In this tale of universal destruction we find a magnificent illustration of the God-Become-Many theme. Although having not yet come, the Kalki form is manifest at Changu Narayan amongst the Eastern struts, awaiting the moment when he will call forth the Age of Truth. For the devotee the Age of Truth can be seen as symbolic of an inner potential, of the recognition of divinity underlying the inner strife. And in this sense Kalki is symbolic of that power which destroys ignorance and gives birth to the inner knowledge even in the present moment.

8th century Vamana avatar

5th centruy Garudasana Narayana [copy of central image]

7th century Garudasana Narayana [copy of central image]

Dashavatar Darshan: At Changu Narayan the *darshan* of not just one, but of all ten *avatars* can be received simultaneously in a very unique way. It is said that this is one of the reason that Changu Narayan is so sacred, for the vision of the *Dashavatars* is even sought by *lamas* from Tibet. Some time ago, the story goes...

> a *lama* in Tibet was struck by the disease of leprosy. One night he dreamt that a radiant being riding atop an enormous bird came to him and advised him to come to Changu Narayan to have the darshan of the ten incarnations. Deeply inspired by the dream, the *lama* set out on his journey the next morning.
>
> That night the temple priest at Changu Narayan was visited by Vishnu in his dreams. The Lord told him that the *lama* would soon be arriving to have darshan. He informed the priest that when he awoke he would find a silver case containing a small, transparent precious stone. By burning a ghee lamp and placing it next to the stone the forms of the *Dashavatars* would appear on the temple wall, the God told him. And sure enough, when the priest awoke, he found the silver case and the stone within. When the *lama* arrived, the priest informed him of his dream. As they spoke the *lama* realized that it was Changu Narayana Himself. With anticipation they entered the temple and the priest, according to Vishnu's instructions, burnt the lamp and through the small stone emerged the ten divine forms of the *avatars*. The vision was so powerful that the *lama* was instantly healed.[26]

According to the temple priest, even today a Tibetan *lama* will visit the temple for this great *darshan*. When a devotee comes seeking *darshan* he gives a small *dakshina*, a monetary offering which helps support the temple and the priest, and then he receives the *darshan* of Vishnu's manifold incarnations.

Vyuha

The theory of *vyuha*, Vishnu's power of emanation, ties in with Pancharatra cosmogony: At the beginning of every cosmic cycle, Lakshmi awakens within the being of Vasudeva-Narayana (or Krishna). As His *kriyashakti* (power of action) she begins to manifest the world. What arises is the *shuddhasrishti*, the "pure creation" containing the primal *gunas* (qualities) of the Lord. These *gunas*, six in number, are already fully present in Vasudeva-Krishna who, in this complex system, is considered the first *vyuha*. As they emanate from His being, these gunas pair together to form knowledge/strength, lordship/virility, and power/splendor. These three pairs constitute, respectively, the *vyuhas* Samkarshana (aka. Balarama), Pradyumna, and Aniruddha (Krishna's brother, son, and grandson)[27]. In each of them, Vishnu-Narayana is entirely present, but in each only two of His *gunas* are manifest.

From these four principal *vyuhas* (including Vasudeva-Narayana as the first *vyuha*) arise twenty more emanations, each a unique combination of the Lord's qualities, to form the twenty-four *caturvishatimurtis*. Although less powerful than the first four *vyuhas*, each is a manifestation of the Lord's supreme qualities. When shown together, in paintings or carvings, they represent Vishnu-Narayana in all His aspects. At Changu Narayan each of the Vishnu's twenty-four *vyuhas* is found on the temple's struts, serving as another powerful symbol of the *Vishvarupa* theme.

When sculpted individually, the *vyuhas* are depicted in standing form (*sthanakamurti*) with four arms, each holding one of Vishnu's main emblems--conch, discus, mace, and lotus. Variation of which emblem is placed in which hand determines the particular *vyuha*. At Changu Narayan there are two *vyuha* forms. Shri Dhara *vyuha*, dating from the seventh century, stands in the northwest corner (See Page 25) This stone image, flanked by Garuda and Lakshmi, is very popular in Nepal. Each *vyuha*, depending on its manifest *gunas*, has special powers. Shri Dhara's powers are said to bestow both prosperity and strength, and thus the *vaishya* class is particularly fond of him.

A second *vyuha* form, located in the northeast end of the courtyard, is worshiped by the brahmin caste. This is the *vyuha* Madhava, known at Changu Narayan as Vishnu Mandap (See Page 25). Madhava is the Lord of Knowledge. In him is manifest the Lord's divine quality of wisdom.

Para

Having discussed Vishnu's *vibhava* and *vyuhas* aspects, we now turn to focus on His *para* or supreme nature. This brings us to the core of the *Vishvarupa* theme. The *para* aspect of the Lord transcends the world, yet there is no form which is not His. For this reason, the *para* aspect is also the *Vishvarupa* or Universal Form. At Changu Narayan there are seven stone sculptures, each a masterpiece, of the Lord's *para* aspect. Two of these images, the Changu Narayana within the central complex and Chinnamasta, are in beheaded form. These are very rare *para* forms and have their unique symbolism. There are two copies of the central para image, but these are not beheaded. There is a fifth *para* image, an amazing sculpture, which depicts Arjuna's vision of Krishna's *Vishvarupa* in the *Bhagavad-Gita*. There are two additional *Vishvarupa* forms called Vaikuntha, which are peculiar to Tantric Vaishnavism and will be discussed below under Tantric Images.

We will begin with Vishnu's beheaded form, a sculptural image found nowhere else in the world...

Changu Narayana: In His supreme aspect Vishnu is called Para-Vasudeva (Supreme Lord). Ultimately, the Lord is beyond all knowledge. He cannot be known through the mind and senses for while He is *saguna* (with attributes), He is also *nirguna* (without attributes); and while He is *sat* (being), He is at the same time *asat* (non-being). He is at once the form and the formless. He assumes form for the sake of His devotees, but He is not bound by form. In His formless aspect He is understood to be the inner god, known by the Pancharatrins as the *antaryamin*. In this light the formless God is an inner experience, known only through devotion and intense spiritual practices, known as *yoga*, which turn the focus within. As God with form, He is understood to be everything, the very universe itself. The form of God is what we can see, the formless is something which has to be experienced. They go hand in hand; one is not more real than the other. They are both God. The form is our physical body. The formless aspect is the consciousness within it which animates the body, enabling it to act, to think and to feel. When Para-Vasudeva is given form it is done so to give the understanding that the Lord is both everything that is manifest as well as everything that is not. The form is a means to the formless, and it also a means to true understanding of the form. These images present to the devotee his God in His ultimate aspect.

At the temple the *para* aspect of Vishnu is, not surprisingly, represented as the deity within the sacred chamber. Just as the *antaryamin* is Para Vishnu within the devotees heart, Garudasana (Changu) Narayana is the God Supreme residing within the temple body. Just as a *yogi* penetrates the depth of his psyche to find the *Brahman*, a devotee passes through the temple courtyard, and the various layers of the temple to the most inner region wherein lies Narayana, as lord of all the worlds. Atop Garuda, Vishnu soars the regions of the three worlds as savior and sovereign of all creation.

In the *Vishnu Purana* there is a famous myth of Garuda Narayana:

> Gajendra was a king who was transformed by a curse transformed into an elephant. He lived for years by the shores of a lake. One day, while he was bathing, a crocodile clamped his jaws tight around the elephants leg and tried to drown him. A tremendous struggle ensued. Eventually, Gajendra began to lose his strength. In that moment he prayed to Vishnu for protection. Instantly, the Lord came soaring from the heavens on his majestic sun-bird and freed him.[28]

Thus, the devotee believes, does Narayana, knower of the inner heart, respond to all prayers of faith.

The statue within the temple is believed to be the original image. Cast in stone and later gilded in gold, it has been worshiped since at least the third century A.D. Fitting the myth of the beheaded god, the stone image may have first been sculpted without a head. An inscription on the gilded part of the image says that in 607 A. D. King Amshuvarman donated a *kavacha* (gilt-sheath) to the god Narayana at Changu. It was donated because the previous donated sheath "had become dilapidated with the passage of time."[29] This *kavacha* is a two-part piece: the lower portion, which is the inscribed portion, covers Narayana's torso and His mount Garuda. The upper portion is Narayana's head-piece and is easily removed from the lower portion. For most of the day, this two-piece *kavacha* is kept in place to display a rather common Garudasana Narayan image. During the morning and evening *puja* , the head piece is removed during a significant rite known as the *shiro-sandhana*, which parallels not only the Changu Narayana myth, but also symbolizes the sacrificial act of becoming the Supreme (*para*) Being. (The significance of this rite will be discussed in the following chapter.) In 1676 A. D., another inscription reads, "while performing the daily worship of Garuda Narayana, when the priest removed the head [i.e. performed the *shiro-sandhana*], the neck and its ornaments broke off."[30] The head was replaced by King Bhupalendra of the Malla dynasty in 1694 A. D. Thus, the present *kavacha* consists of two gifts from two kings of different dynasty's nearly a thousand years apart. It attests to the enduring popularity of this beheaded Narayana.

In Chapter II we heard the Nepalese and Indian myths of the beheaded Vishnu. The account in the thirteenth *kanda* of Satapatha-Brahmana (roughly 800 B. C.) is the earliest mention of a beheaded Vishnu. The age of the two Nepalese versions of this myth--which have Vishnu being beheaded in one instance by the demon Mura and in another by an angry and unknowing *brahmin—is* open to speculation. If the image was originally sculpted in beheaded form, then the myth most likely predates the temple's construction. If the head was knocked off for some reason, then the myths probably arose to explain Narayana's beheaded condition. However, we know the image was in beheaded form by at least 607 A. D. Amshuvarma's inscription says that he replaced the dilapidated kavacha with a *similar* one. It does not say that since the head had fallen off, he was also donating a head piece. This suggests

The central image of Garudasana (Changu) Narayana [1 st – 2 nd century?]

strongly that the previous kavacha also had a removable head piece to adorn an image sculpted to portray a beheaded Narayana. Further, the Changu Narayana priest, who alone can examine closely the sacred Narayana, says that the neck region of the stone image is very smooth, suggesting it was originally cut this way.[31] If this indeed is the case, that the Narayan was intended to be beheaded, then it is curious that He has been given a gilt head piece. One answer, suggested to the author by the temple priest, is that "it is more pleasing for the devotee to see his god with a head." However, scripture says that the form of the beheaded god is very sacred and powerful, as well as frightening and mysterious. It is possible that the head is kept in place so that the very significant rite of beheading can be enacted each day. This daily rite may be part of what lends such spiritual authority to the temple. Indeed, the *Satapatha-Brahmana* (XIII, 1, 2) proclaims, the sacrificed Narayana becomes "All this." Once sacrificed, Narayana becomes the Vishvarupa; he rises from being *a god* to being the Supreme Person whose form is the universe.

In the courtyard there are two copies of the central image. One dates from the fifth and the other from the seventh century A.D. They, like the image in the sanctum, show Vishnu with four arms holding the *chakra*, mace, conch and lotus-seed. The number four is a powerful symbol of supremacy. It expresses dominion over the four directions, as well as the four aims of life which are pleasure, success, righteousness, and liberation. It also represents the Vedas, the *yugas*, and the four-fold caste system.

Unlike the image in the sanctum, the two courtyard pieces depict Narayana with head, suggesting that by at least the fifth century the image within the temple was wearing his gilt *kavacha*. This image is very popular. Pratyapaditya Pal has cited over twenty-three stone copies of Garudasana Narayana throughout the Valley.[32] It is also the insignia of the Nepalese ten-rupee bill.

Chinnamasta: In the southeast corner of the courtyard the beheaded goddess, Chinnamasta, surrounded by nine other manifestations of the goddess in a sacred configuration known as the *Maha-vidyas*, (the ten great wisdoms), is enshrined as the *para* aspect in female form. The *Chinnamasta-Tantra* (5, 12) describes her in this way:

> Her left foot forward in battle, she holds her severed head and a knife. Naked, she drinks voluptuously the stream of the blood-nectar flowing from her beheaded body. The jewel on her forehead is tied with a serpent. She has three eyes. Her breasts are

adorned with lotuses. Inclined toward lust, she sits erect above the god of love, who shows signs of lustfulness. She looks like the red China rose.[33]

Chinnamasta is not commonly associated with Pancharatra or Vaishnava themes, for She is an aspect of Durga, the consort of Shiva. However, Her placement adjacent to a beheaded Vishnu seems far from a mistake. The *Nepal-mahatmya* describes her as emerging from Vishnu's fallen body to slay the demon Mura (as discussed in Chapter II). Although the demon Mura could not be slain by a god (or goddess), the beheaded form of the Chinnamasta is not just a particular, divine being. It is the supreme form of creative power (*shakti*). Chinnamasta *is* the Lord's para aspect. She is that essence which creates, destroys, and sustains all. It is through the *shakti*, the divine power that the Vishvarupa comes into being.[34] She is the power of sacrifice because "the sacrifice is indeed beheaded (*Satapatha-Brahmana*, V, 11)."[35] Hence she is named "Beheaded" (*chinnamasta*). The nature of Her symbolism gives us some insight into the significance of the headless Vishnu.

The "Purusha-sukta" (*Rig-Veda* X, 92) explains that the universe comes into being through the sacrifice of Purusha, the Cosmic Man. His bodily dismemberment leads to the life of the cosmos. The Purusha is slain to become all that is; He is sacrificed and through this becomes the Vishvarupa—He becomes the form of the entire universe. Once the sacrificial act has created the world, "it [the world] continues to exist, depending for its sustenance on destruction, on burning, on devouring."[36] Paradoxically, the world is sustained by the destructive act. Chinnamasta, with her own hand, severs her head. Though slain, she lives. The blood of creation spouting from her neck is guzzled by the severed head she holds in her left hand. Sacrificing her self, she becomes her own nourishment. As the supreme goddess, her sacrifice benefits the entire universe. The spouting blood, symbolic of her great power, is nothing but the creative potential from which arises the Universal Form.

In human life the first offering is the semen. From this giving arises the child. The greatest sacrifice is the offering of blood, the giving of life. This offering becomes the food upon which other beings can live. In this way the cosmogonic cycle of eating and being eaten, of taking life and feeding life is carried on. This is not a law of the jungle, but an understanding the Vedic sages used to attain realization. It has both a physical and metaphysical meaning. In the Bhagavad-Gita, Lord Krishna says: "Beings exist from food;

food is brought into being by the rain god; the rain god is cherished through sacrifice, sacrifice is brought into being by action (III, 14)." Hence, ritual sacrifice is performed by man seeking to co-operate with, and continue the rhythms of, cosmic life. In the scriptures, the whole system of the universe is divided into the *pancha-yajna* (the five sacrifices). These are the sacrifices that the righteous man makes to the elements (*bhuta-yajna*), to men (*manushya-yajna*), to the ancestors (*pitru-yajna*), to the gods (*deva-yajna*) and to the Absolute (*brahma-yajna*). "The Beheaded [*chinnamasta*] rules over all of them."[37] As a destructive, though life-giving act, the sacrifice is symbolized by Chinnamasta. Yet, sacrifice is also a means of sustenance, and in this way connected with Vishnu, "the Sustainer," who is the "pure essence of the sacrifice (*Satapatha-Brahmana* XIV, 1,1, 20)."

At Changu Narayan, the Beheaded has assumed two forms. As Chinnamasta, this Principle is horrific. It receives the blood sacrifices of goats and other animals, symbolically drinking the blood which quenches the eternal thirst for sacrifice. As Vishnu, this Principle is more benign. Changu Narayana does not accept meat.[38] He is content with flowers, candies and other bloodless foods. The Pancharatra Agamas as a rule condemn animal sacrifice. However, the practice is widely accepted in Nepal, and for this reason most Nepalese Vaishnavites perform the bloody ritual in which the animal's head is severed from the body. While doctrine has passed down the belief that blood should not be offered to Vishnu, the devotee can perform this worship in front of the Goddess's shrine, away from the sight of the Lord.

Chinnamasta's shrine at Changu Narayan is nearly always closed and it is not possible to officially date the sculpture. However, eyewitness dating by art historians estimate that it is from the early centuries A.D. It is theorized that *sadhikas* (practitioners) of the Chinnamasta cult worshiped atop Doladri Hill prior to the Vaishnavas. Then (as is common in Nepal), the latter came along, adapted their theology to the existing tradition, and erected a shrine.[39] This theory, however, is problematic. Chinnamasta is a Tantric deity. Her roots, like those of many Tantric deities, are traced to the early-to-middle centuries of the first millenium. It is more likely that, because of obvious parallels with Changu Narayana, She was enshrined sometime after He came to rest atop Doladri.

We cannot end this discussion of the Beheaded without once again turning to Buddhism. Sculpted in a niche about five-hundred feet below the western entrance is a beheaded statue of Avalokiteshvara. Little is known about this

Chinnamasta, representing the goddess in beheaded and supreme (para) *form. Although destructive, her beheading gives rise to creation. Symbolic of this, she drinks her own life-giving blood. Rajasthan, 18th century.*

image. It is possible that the head was stolen, but the smoothness at the break-point suggests that it was originally carved this way. It seems the sculptor was playing with the theme already expressed in the temple courtyard. Today, both Hindu and Buddhist devotees, on special occasions will make animal sacrifices to this image before having the *darshan* of Changu Narayana and Chinnamasta, the headless forms of supreme (*para*) divinity atop the Swinging Hill.

Vishvarupa-darshana: In its manifest potential the *para* aspect of the Lord is His Vishvarupa or Universal Form. In Chapter XI of the *Bhagavad Gita*, entitled "*Vibhuti-yoga*" ("The *Yoga* of Manifestation"), Lord Krishna reveals His supreme form to the disciple Arjuna.[40] . In this chapter Krishna declares Himself to be immanent in every human being and every object of the world, animate and inanimate. He proclaims the all-pervasiveness of His form and yet the diversity of His nature and manifestation; although One, He is many. He is the One in all its variations of expression. In humility, Arjuna, the supreme *bhakta*, accepts these divine words saying, "What thou hast said now I know to be truth, O Keshava! that neither gods nor men nor demons comprehend Thy mystery made manifest!"[41] He then requests Krishna to reveal the mystery of His manifestation. Pleased with Arjuna's devotion the Lord grants him *Vishvarupadarshana*, the vision of His universal form.

Arjuna received that which is the ultimate goal of all paths: to see that all this diversity is contained within the single body of God. This amazing vision has been crafted in the temple courtyard leaving us a stone statue described by Pratyapaditya Pal as, "...one of the boldest attempts made in sculpture."[42] Isolated like a drop of sea water, this *murti* is a perfect symbol of the vast, temple ocean; in its depiction of the manifold within the One, it is a perfect replica of the Vishvarupa Mandir.

The image shows Krishna-Vishnu, like a pillar, stretching from *patala* (hell) to the heavenly realms of *svarga loka*. Like the Vamana sculpture, it shows the Lord encompassing the three worlds (the entire universe). Below Vishnu is His vehicle Ananta, king of the serpents and Lord of the underworld, who incarnated as Balarama.

Supporting Vishnu's feet is Bhuvani, the goddess earth whom the Lord brought up from the depths at the beginning of creation. On her sides are two devotional *nagas* flanked by two pairs of elephants, the *diggajas*, which symbolize the four directions. To His left is Garuda, while Lakshmi, the *shakti* is to His right standing next to the awestruck Arjuna. Also shown are the four

dikpalas, the guardians of the cardinal directions: Indra, Varuna, Yama (the god of death), and Kubera, the god of riches.

Above the *dikpalas* on the right side are the Eight Spheres of Existence, called *vasus* in the Vedas, and the eleven *rudras*. At the top right of the stele is the disc of the sun and Shiva seated on a lotus. The left has been damaged, but it is safe to assume that it once displayed the disc of the moon and Brahma. Below the damaged portion can be seen the asuras, the demons depicted as emaciated figures cringing at the divine sight of the Lord. Their expressions directly contrast those of the gods on the opposite side, and in this way Vishnu is balanced to His right by good and to His left by evil.

Vishnu is shown with ten heads. This is to show that He is omniscient, covering the eight directions as well as the space above and the space below. All the faces except one are benign. This is to show that the Lord is both loving and compassionate, as well as fierce and terrifying. He is at once angelic and demonic. Entering the jaws of the fearsome face can be seen a human body fitting the description in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "Between Thy jaws they lie (XI, 27F)." This is a reference to Vishnu as all-devouring Time; that which brings an ultimate death to everything.

Careful examination also shows that from His feet, thighs, shoulders, and head beings are emerging as if being born from these places. This comes from the "Purusha-sukta" which says that the *shudra* caste emerged from Purusha's feet; the *vaishya* caste from His thighs, the *kshatriyas* from His shoulder, and the *brahmins* from His head. This single sculpture embraces many themes of the Vaishnava cult and above all illustrates that the Lord is everywhere and all-encompassing. Good and evil are but two sides of His nature; human kind is but the parts of His body. His heads look out in all directions always surveying the manifest world which He will one day consume as the power of Time.

Tantric Images

In the eleventh century the Indian university of Nalanda was destroyed by Muslims. At this great center of learning, the ideas of Hindu and Buddhist Tantra were being developed by the leading scholars of the era. With the school's destruction, many of these scholars migrated to Nepal, bringing Tantra with them. Tantric images are almost always depicted with multiple heads and limbs as a way of illustrating a deity's infinite power or *shakti*.

Since *shakti* is most often equated with the feminine, Tantric images, if not solely of the Goddess, usually show Her in the lap or at the side of Her Lord.

Vaikuntha: The image known as Vishvarupa Vaikuntha or Maha Vishnu, manifest in both the southwestern and northeastern corners of the temple complex, is a classic Tantric image. Further, as its title suggests, this image, like Krishna Vibhuti and Garudasana Narayana, is a symbol of the Lord in His (*para*) supreme form. In this light, its association with Vaikuntha, Vishnu's heavenly abode and "Highest place," is quite apparent.

The two courtyard pieces show Vishnu atop Garuda with Lakshmi on his lap. Traditionally, the Vaikuntha image is sculpted with four heads, symbolic of the four main *vyuhas* (including Vasudeva-Narayana as the first, supreme emanation). However, the one in the north of the complex has five, and in the south, seven. The fifth head of the former (eighteenth century) image, is placed atop the other four as a symbol of the *para* aspect from which the emanations arise (Page 200). This is believed to be an influence of a Tibetan Buddhist theme, common in the Valley, where a single head, representing the primal Buddha, is often added to an image. The extra three heads of the latter, very rare image (nineteenth century), are representative of the seven *chakras* or psychic centers within the body (Page 143). Like the seventh *chakra* (the *sahasrar)*, the seventh head is the place of the Lord's supreme, indivisible power.

As a *vishvarupa* or *vibhuti* form, it is said of Vaikuntha that "With such a body, the god, the greatest in the universe, sustains the whole world."[43] Although in this form Vishnu manifests in a unique, Tantric way, the message remains the same—the one called Narayana is none other than *Brahman*, the all-encompassing reality. Whether He manifests as Changu Narayana (a deity from the Vedic age), Krishna (a deity from the Puranic age), or Vaikuntha (a deity from the Tantric age), He remains the Supreme. He can replicate Himself in countless forms and in countless eras yet the wholeness of His being is never divided.

Forms of Shiva: In his wrathful form, Shiva is Lord Bhairava, a rotund, demon-headed figure whose very appearance sends the demonic forces within man crawling to the Lord's feet, begging for forgiveness. This seventeenth century image, portraying another of Tantra's iconographic qualities—that of divine wrathfulness—stands within a small, free-standing brick niche near the western entrance.

Five-headed 18th century Vaikuntha Vishnu

In the northern region of the complex Shiva again appears in his *un*manifest form. This "image," known as Nriteshvar, is an adaptation of the Indian Nataraja, which depicts Shiva as the Lord of the Dance. In Nepal Nriteshvar is never given sculptural form. Rather, he is represented by the space left empty by carefully placed bricks. As the Lord of the Dance, this Tantric form of Shiva is loved by the Nepalese musicians who often worship him by playing music.

Arddhanarishvara/Lakshmi-Narayana: *Brahman*, although beyond distinctions of gender, contains within Himself,[44] and manifests as, both male and female. They are the two aspects of His non-dual being. When *Brahman* is worshiped as Shiva, He is sculpted in the half-male, half-female form known as Arddhanarishvara. When the Absolute is worshiped as Vishnu, He is sculpted in a similar form under the title Lakshmi-Narayana. As one approaches the eastern entrance way, one is presented with an image which sets the scene for the entrance into the courtyard. Placed within a brick niche there is a composite image which portrays both Arddhanarishvara and Lakshmi-Narayana side by side in a magnificent stone relief from the eighteenth century. Beneath the image of Arddhanarishvara are the bull and ram, the vehicles of Shiva and his wife Parvati. In Vishnu's male and female hands can be seen His various emblems. Below His feet, Garuda and an elephant, the vehicles of Vishnu and Lakshmi, bow in reverence. At the top of the relief is the Shiva-*linga*, an abstract symbol of male-female union. With its phallic piece pointing upwards, it seems to point to that transcendent reality from which the opposites arise. Like the temple itself, it suggests a unified being beyond, yet manifest within, the realm of creation.

Garuda: One final stone sculpture remains to be discussed. This is the mighty stone image of Garuda, dating from the fifth century, seated in his characteristic position of a kneeling devotee at the entrance way of the western doors. The Vedic sages often spoke of the sun as Suparna (beautiful-of-wing), which is one of the many names of Garuda.[45] As Vishnu was also associated with the sun, it is easy to see how the two would be closely related: Garuda becoming the God's winged mount and supreme devotee. (The Sanskrit word *garudasana* means "posture of a devotee.") The image at Changu Narayan shows Garuda wreathed with the serpent Takshaka, his arch foe and prize of reconciliation from Avalokiteshvara. In traditions around the world, the antagonism of the bird and the serpent has been commonly acknowledged. In Hinduism this opposition is seen in the elements: the sun force, symbolized as

18th century Arddhanarishvara/Lakshmi–Narayana

the bird Garuda, against the liquid energy of the water realms, of which the serpent Ananta is King. The bird is addressed as, Nagantaka: "He who kills serpents." Yet, despite their eternal antagonism, the bird and serpent have one very important thing in common, for in the sense that Garuda and Ananta are symbolic representatives of the entire race of which they are respectively Lords, both offer their bodies as vehicles (*vahanas*) for the divine body of Vishnu to whom they both bow as their Lord Supreme. "This," writes Heinrich Zimmer,

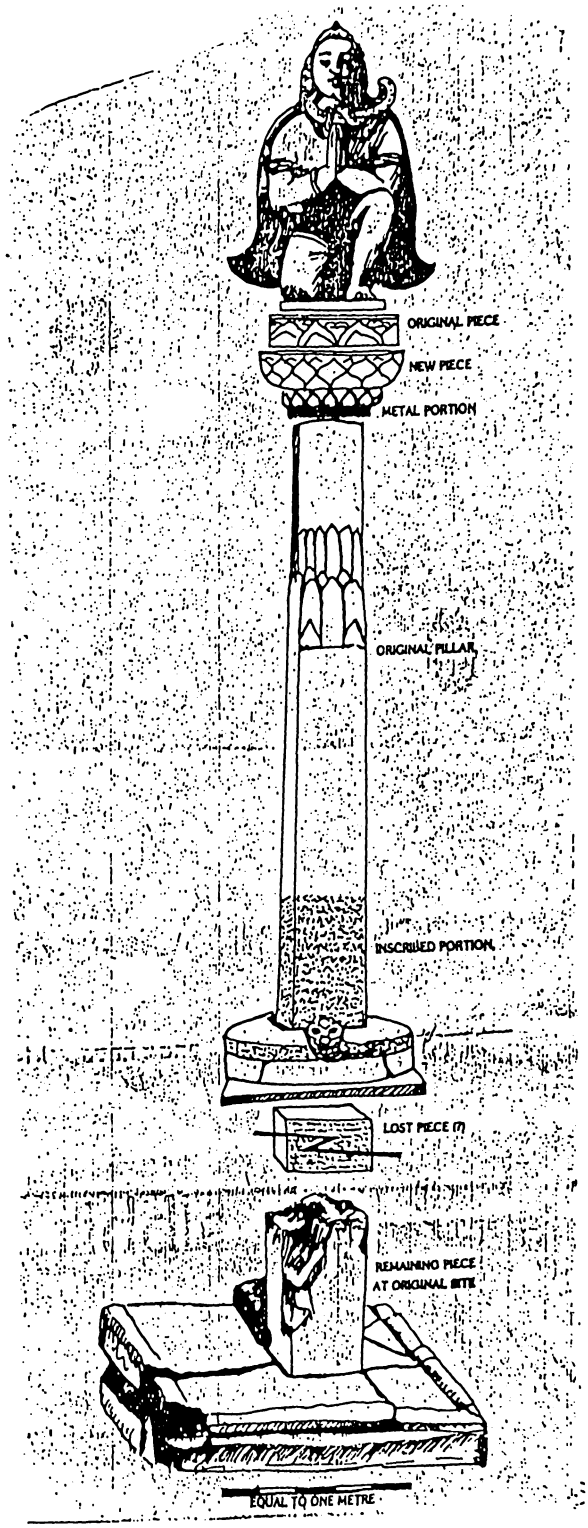
> is a paradox with reason; for Vishnu is the Absolute, the all-containing divine Essence. He comprises all dichotomies. The Absolute becomes differentiated in polarized manifestations, and through these the vital tensions of the world-process are brought into existence and maintained."[46]

Adorned with his serpent necklace, kneeling with folded hands before Lord Vishnu, the Garuda image expresses the ultimate unity of the life forces.

Like most Garuda images in Nepal, the Changu Narayan sculpture depicts the great feathered *bhakta* in anthropomorphic form with celestial wings. The face, however, is unusual for it is believed to be a portrait, most probably of King Manadeva. As such it expresses the king's own sense of devotion to the Lord by identifying himself with Garuda.

When first erected, Garuda stood some fifteen feet high atop the pillar bearing Manadeva's famous inscription. Sometime around the eleventh century this pillar was broken in two, leaving the larger of the two portions still standing in front of the entrance way, while the piece bearing Manadev's inscription has been moved to the immediate north of the temple doors. Garuda now rests in his kneeling posture at the northern side of the larger piece, directly opposite the temple doors where he may see, and be seen, by the Lord.

Some scholars believe the pillar break to have been caused by external or internal invaders. However, documents describing domestic and international conflict offer no evidence for such a theory. A local legend suggests another cause: standing fifteen feet in height, Garuda was once several feet higher than the central image of Vishnu. At such a position of apparent superiority, the god-bird ignorantly laughed at his Master. Insulted and angry, the Lord whirled His discus at the pillar, cracked it in two, and sent the proud winged-one tumbling to his proper position kneeling at the feet of Vishnu.


ORIGINAL PIECE
NEW PIECE
METAL PORTION
ORIGINAL PILLAR
INSCRIBED PORTION
LOST PIECE (?)
REMAINING PIECE
AT ORIGINAL SITE
EQUAL TO ONE METRE

Metaphorically this story illustrates the folly of a *bhakta*'s pride, his greatest enemy. Standing on the pillar of his arrogance man sees himself as the superior of the Lord and he laughs in ignorance until the Lord, with one stroke of grace, sends him tumbling into humility, a position in which he is then exalted to the highest.

On another level Lord Vishnu's anger might be an allusion to an earthquake. A fairly big quake could have sent the Garuda statue, sitting freely atop the pillar, tumbling to the ground. Hitting the edge of the square pillar at the bottom would have caused the now famous pillar to break in two. Perhaps symbolic of the "price of pride," Garuda still bears a gash on the left side of his head.

B. *ARCHA* IN BRONZE

The earliest inscribed date on any bronze piece in Nepal is from the sixth-seventh century. However, a few copper coins have been found dating from the fifth century. The dates and letters on these coins are finely executed, and the various designs, including animals, are beautifully carved. Wang Hsuang-t' se's account praises highly the metal work in Nepal, calling special attention to a golden Buddha which rested above the bed of King Narendradeva. There are also several Licchavi inscriptions which tell us that Nepalese copper was exported to India by at least the sixth-seventh centuries.[47]

Based on this information it seems clear that metallurgical arts had been in practice quite some time before the sixth-seventh century. Studying the temple of Changu Narayan, we can find evidence which pushes back the dawn of metal working in Nepal to the early years of the first millennium.

In the two temple storerooms[48] there are hundreds of beautiful metal objects, most being the gifts of devotees. Among these is a bronze statue of Lakshmi. It bears no inscription, but stylistic analysis leads to a second century A.D. attribution.[49] If these analyses prove correct, then this beautiful piece would be the oldest known bronze work in Nepal; and, I wonder, might it not be a copy of some work done many years before? This early date also gives further credence to the suggested origin date of Changu Narayan in the first or second centuries A. D.

An inscription from the seventh century by King Amshuvarman sheds further light on this discussion of origins.[50] It declares that he replaced the gilded dress of Garuda due to its dilapidated condition. This statue, being the

image in the inner sanctum, has always been safe from the wear and tear of daily weather. That it was, as early as the seventh century, in a "dilapidated condition," suggests that it had been around from a much earlier time. It provides further evidence for an early origin date of both metal work in Nepal and the construction of the temple.

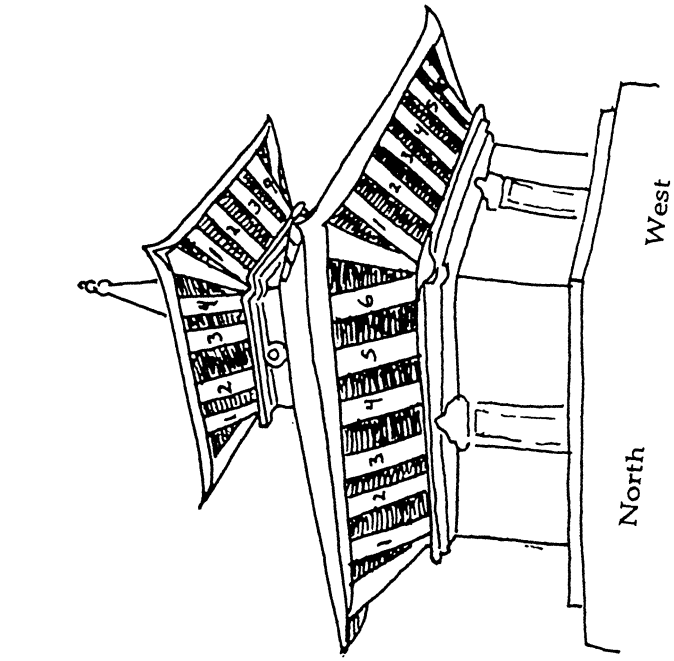
In the courtyard there is a beautiful gilt sculpture of King and Queen Bhupalendramalla. Enshrined within a metal cage and elevated some four feet above the ground on a stone pillar, this image depicts the royal couple in a devotional posture. Fittingly, they are placed across from the western doorway. When the doors open, they can have Narayana's darshan. An inscription on this image from 1674 A. D. says the king and queen dedicated the image after restoring the temple from fire damage.[51]

Once again we can see the richness contained within the Vishvarupa Mandir. A study of its art reveals at once the mythology of the people, their religious beliefs and practices, and the history of the nation. It also reveals a change in artistic style presenting us with work from the first-second century A. D. to the present.

C. *Archa* in Wood

Distinctive of all Nepalese pagodas are the *tona*, or wooden struts, whose weighty task is to support the overhanging roof. However, like the rest of the temple, their purpose is far more than functional. Each is carved in the likeness of a divinity.[52] Facing down as they slant outwards from the wall, the *tona* are positioned so that the devotee, as he circumambulates the temple, may gaze upon the many forms of God. At Changu Narayan these divine images, sculpted in the eighteenth century, are among the most beautiful in Nepal. They offer us a sampling of the best of the Nepalese woodcraft.

The first storey contains twenty-four struts plus four corner struts. The second storey has sixteen struts plus four corner struts, making, in all, forty-eight struts. Despite their continual replacement due to natural damage, the arrangement of the *tona* is not random. It follows closely the systematic rules of Tantric iconography. However, this seems of little importance to the common devotee who sees in the first-storey struts the *caturvishatimurtis*, or twenty-four principle *vyuhas* of Vishnu. Technically, this syncretic vision isn't true, for while the numbers add up, the names and forms don't. Fifteen of the bottom struts, including nine of the *Dashavatars* (excluding Buddha who is



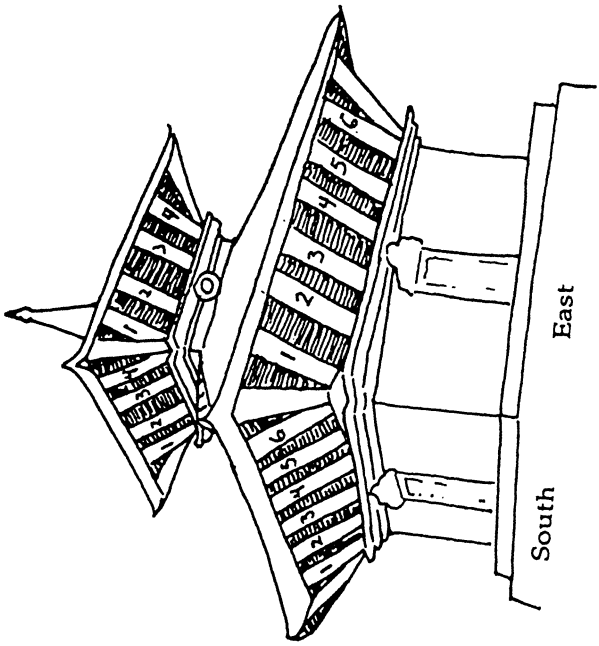


Diagram of Struts

East

bottom

1. Banhi Shiva - Shiva as fire
2. Madhava Vishnu
3. Brahma
4. Indra
5. Kalki
6. Manjushri

top

1. Balarama (Ananta)
2. Dhamodhara Vishnu
3. Hari-Hara
4. Shesha

West

bottom

1. Pawana
2. Narasinha
3. Varaha
4. Varuna
5. Kurma
6. Matsya

top

1. Saraswati
2. Vamana
3. Krishna
4. Krishna

South

bottom

1. Bhairava
2. Ananta-Vishnu
3. Vishvarupa Krishna
4. Shiva as Niririti
5. Trailokya Mohana Vishnu
6. Vaikuntha Vishnu

top

1. Buddha
2. Tumburu
3. Vishnu
4. Keshava Vishnu

North

bottom

1. Isana Shiva
2. Vishnu Madukaithabhari
3. Rama
4. Kubera
5. Parashurama
6. Vamana

top

1. Krishna
2. Lakshmi-Narayana
3. Hari-Hara
4. Vasudeva-Narayana

Layout of struts - refer to preceding page

amongst the upper struts), are specific forms of Vishnu. Of these not all match up with the twenty-four classical forms listed in the Pancharatra scriptures.[53] The remaining nine include the Vedic *dikpalas*, Shiva, and Manjushri. So how can they be called the twenty-four *vyuhas*? The answer is actually quite simple once you live with the Nepalese for a while. As Professor Aryal told me, "For the Nepalese Vaishnavite all the gods are *vyuhas* of Vishnu."

Careful examination of the struts reveals two themes indicative of the temple's antiquity. The first is a lack of erotic images so commonly found on Nepalese struts. In the place of human or animal beings engaged in sexual play, one finds the benign image of a *rishi* beneath the feet of each of the *tona* deities. The theme of erotica was introduced to Nepal through Tantric symbolism, which came much later than the temple's construction. The *rishis* are thus believed to be iconographic remnants of the original temple struts.

The second theme is a rare predominance of Vedic deities. Of the six deities on the western side of the temple, five—Pavana, Varuna, Kurma, Varaha, and Matsya—date back to the Vedas. A configuration of ancient deities such as this is found nowhere else in Nepal. Although each of the images are now sculpted in multi-limbed, Tantric form, their origins, like the temple, are ancient.

According to temple records,[54] the sixteen upper struts were once the sixteen deities symbolic of the phases of the waxing moon, suggesting the importance of the moon's movement in regard to the ritual life of the temple.[55] Now, like the bottom struts, the originals have mostly been replaced. With the exception of Tumburu, a celestial musician (*ghandharva*), each of these images is a specific form of Vishnu. Of particular beauty are the struts on the northern quarter of the temple which depict—from west to east—Krishna, Lakshmi-Narayana, Hari-Hara (half Shiva/half Vishnu), and Vasudeva or Para Vishnu. Each of these is a symbol of Vishnu in His Supreme form. As the devotee encircles the temple, gazing at the twenty-four *vyuhas*, he can look up at the second storey and see the various manifestations of that supreme reality from which the *vyuhas* arise.

The eight corner struts are the biggest for they have the most weight to carry. The mythical figures on these struts is a griffin with the face of a man, bird's wings, and a lion's body. There is a Nepalese story of obvious Shaivite inclination which gives an account of the origin of this creature who is currently supporting so many of the temple roofs in Nepal:

> After the Narasinha avatar had killed the demon he was filled with such anger that he began to shake the entire universe. To protect the world, Lord Shiva assumed the form of a man-headed, flying beast, grabbed the enraged avatar, carried him out into space and killed him. Thereafter Shiva tore off the man-lion's skin and draped it around himself.[56]

At Changu Narayan we "read" what seems to be the missing conclusion of this tale. Although Shiva had destroyed Vishnu's form as Narasinha, he had done nothing, it would seem, to that Primal Being who is the cause and foundation of the universe. Indeed, Vishnu appears to have been very pleased with Shiva's tremendous demonstration of strength—He assigned the mighty god the honored task of supporting the massive form of His Vishvarupa Mandir.

NOTES

1 Landon, Perceval. *Nepal.* Ratna Pustak Bhandar: Kathmandu, Nepal. 1987, p. 222.

2 This term refers specifically to a set of scriptural texts, but also implies the tradition which bases its practices on these texts.

3 *Bhagavad-Gita* (XI, 18).

4 Pal,. Pratyapaditya. *Vaishnava Iconology in Nepal* The Asiatic Society: Calcutta,1985. p. 62.

5 For a more in-depth study see Gonda's discussion in *Vishnuism and Shivaism,* (Athlone Press, 1970, pp. 54-55). Danielou's discussion in *Hindu Polytheism* is also helpful, pp. 165-188.

6 Danielou, Alain. *Hindu Polytheism.* Bollingen Series: N. Y., 1964. p. 165.

7 *Ibid.,* Danielou p. 165.

8 *Maya-shakti* is also the Lord's power of emanation. Without *maya,* the creation of the universe is not possible, because it is the Lord's power of *maya* which creates the appearance of duality. See Zimmer's insightful discussion in "II. The Mythology of Vishnu", (*Myth and Symbols in Indian Art and Civilization.* , pp.23-59.)

9 This tradition of royal *avatars* is several hundred years old. Interestingly, the king is not allowed to look upon the sleeping Vishnu at Budha Nilakantha. If he does so, if he gazes upon his own sleeping form, he will die.

10 Wilkins, W. J. *Hindu Mythology.* Rupa & Co: Calcutta, 1970; p. 142.

11 See Peter Hayes discussion in "The Mind", *Darshan – in the Company of the Saints* V. 23, SYDA Foundation: South Fallsburg, NY, 1989.

12 *Ibid.,* Wilkins, p. 146.

13 The architect of any temple seeks to identify himself with Vishvakarman, the Universal Architect.

14 *Op. cit.,* Wilkins, p. 146.

15 *Op. cit., Vishnuism and Shivaism.* p. 129ff.

16 *Op. cit.,* Pal, p. 26; from the *Atharva-veda,* 12, I, 48.

17 *Op. cit.,* Zimmer, p. 16.

18 *Op. cit.,* Pal, p. 39.

19 *Ibid.,* Pal, p. 39.

20 Gonda, Jan. *Aspects of Early Vishnuism.* Athlone Press, *1970,* p.50.

21 *Ibid.,* Gonda, p. 119.

22 There are four main *jatis* (castes) of Hindus: at the top of the social hierarchy there are the *brahmins* (priests); then come the *kshatriyas* (warriors); then the *vaishyas* (merchants); and finally, the *shudra,* or servant caste. These four castes are said to have arisen respectively from the head arms, thighs and feet of the Purusha.

23 *Op. cit.,* Wilkins, p. 226.

24 See Appendix B.

25 *Op. cit.,* Zimmer, p. 19.

26 Story as told by Mukunda Aryal during interview on 2/15/89.

27 This is an attempt to unify theology with mythology and philosophy, showing how Krishna and his family are earthly manifestations of Vishnu-Narayana and His *gunas.*

28 *Bhagavata Purana* pt. 1. ch. 8-12.

29 See Amshuvarma's seventh century inscription in Appendix A.

30 Slusser, Mary. *Nepal Mandala.* Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1982, p. 253.

31 Mukunda Aryal says that he has seen the image from a distance of about three feet and verifies that the neck is "very smooth."

32 *Op. cit.*, Pal, p.75.

33 *Op. cit.*, Danielou, pp. 280-281.

34 See Zimmer's illuminating discussion in *Op. cit., Myth,*"V. The Goddess", pp. 189-197.

35 *Op. cit.*, Danielou , p. 280.

36 *Ibid.*, p. 280.

37 *Ibid.*, Danielou, p. 280. Danielou does not cite the scripture for this quote, but seems rooted in the notion that Chinnamasta is the supreme *Devi* of sacrificial power.

38 See interview with Changu Narayan *brahmin* in Appendix C.

39 Interview with Mukunda Aryal; 4/15/89.

40 From this chapter arises the Pancharatra theory of *vibhuti*, or manifestation of God. In manifest form Vishnu-Narayan is always Para-Vishnu.

41 *Bhagavad Gita.* (X, 14.) Translated by Pal in *Vaishnava Iconography.*

42 *Op. cit.*, Pal, p. 52.

43 *Ibid.*, p. 109.

44 Scholars commonly use the masculine pronoun when speaking of the *Brahman.*

45 For Garuda's other names see: *Op. cit.*, Danielou, p. 162.

46 *Op. cit.*, Zimmer, p. 76.

47 For more on the history of Nepalese bronze work see: Op., cit., Slusser, pp.16-17, 38-40,. For more on accounts of Huan-t' se see: Lévi, Sylvain. "Les Missions de Wang Hiuen-Ts'e dans l'Inde," Journal Asiatique, 1900, ser. 9, vol. 15, 297-341, 401-468. 1900.

48 One storeroom is found on the second floor of the temple. A second is located in Hanuman Dhoka, Kathmandu. I was prohibited from entering these rooms. However, both Mukunda Aryal and Mohan Khanal have examined the Lakshmi statue. [Khanal's discussion is found in *Changu Narayanka Aitasika Samagri (The Historical Documents of Changu Narayan)*]. Nepal and Asiatic Research Center: Tribhuvan University Kathmandu, Nepal 1983.]

49 Using the lost-wax process, sculptors in the early centuries up to the tenth century, executed their work with certain characteristic features: the bodies are found to be very proportionate, with a limited use of ornaments, and a style which created a sense of mobility. After the tenth century, the figures became more stocky, with a heavy use of ornaments, and disproportionate bodies . We also find the multi-headed and multi-armed deities of the Tantric school. Such features help an art historian to estimate the date of a statue.

50 See Appendix A.

51 See Appendix A.

52 The Newari woodcarver sculpts each *tona* out of a carefully measured, single block of wood. After the deity's body has been carved, the arms are attached separately.

53 *Op. cit.*, Pal. See his Appendix.

54 Interview with Mr. Aryal on 5/22/68 These records were not available for my use.

55 The number sixteen is also considered to be *purnam* (perfect, full) It is the number of *Brahman*, and representsthe totality. In this sense the sixteen upper struts are another powerful indication that the temple is the *Vishvarupa*.

56 As related to me by Mukunda Aryal.

Chapter Six

Temple Worship: Bringing the Vishvarupa to Life

The Hindu scriptures proclaim that the sacrifice of Purusha gave rise to the universe and that the continual acts of ritual sustain it. Ritual is thus an act of supreme, cosmic significance. It is at once the origin and sustenance of the Vishvarupa. Although the devotees who come to Changu Narayan may not know the technical details of the ritual elements, there is an undeniable sense of reverence for ritual, a belief in its unfailing power. For this reason I have sought here to describe the temple ritual in scriptural terms, so that the reader, too, might sense the awe with which the Nepalese honor the Vishvarupa Mandir.

Ritual is the spiritual core of temple activity. It is a complex practice which at once brings the deity to life, sanctifies the complex, and guides the worshiper to liberation, to the realization of the divinity within himself. Ritual revolves around the belief that if His *murti* is purified, God will inhabit it. It is not the object which is revered so much as the essence represented by the object. "So that the worshiper may accomplish his spiritual destiny," writes Karapatri, "shapes are imagined as the images of the Immensity which dwells in all qualities, although Itself beyond qualities, beyond comprehension, beyond form."[1]

Through the worship of the particular, knowledge is sought of the Totality. The deity at Changu Narayan, as with all Hindu temples, is a doorway to the Beyond, a threshold between the sacred and the profane. It is so because it is itself sacred. The worship of the statue is the worship of God who is found in His entirety in every aspect of the world. In the *Vishnu Purana* the devoted gods praise Vishnu as the All in everything:

You are everything, earth, water, fire, air and space,
the subtle world, the Nature-of-All
and the Person who stands forever aloof.

O Self of all beings!
From the Creator (Brahma, Purusha) to the blade of grass,
all is your body, visible and invisible,
divided by space and time.

We, the gods, worship you in our selves;
we, Indra, Surya, Rudra,

the Indweller, Vasu, who are all your shapes
while you are our Selves.

O Vishnu! We worship you as knowledge
in the peaceful form of the seers,
faultless, free from sin.

O Dweller in the lotus of the Heart! We bow to you
as the self of Time which, at the end of the ages,
infallibly devours all beings.

O Universal Self! We bow to you under that elemental shape
from which beasts and men have sprung,
gods and living beings, ether and the elements,
sound and all the qualities.

O Transcendent Self! we bow to you as the Cause of causes
the Principal shape beyond compare,
beyond Nature (pradhana) and Intellect.

O All-Powerful Bhagavan! We bow to your shape
which the seers alone perceive and in which is found
no white nor other color, no length nor other dimension,
no density nor other quality.

Purer than purity it stands
beyond the sphere of quality.

We bow to you, the birthless, the indestructible,
outside whom there is but nothingness.
You are the ever-present within our bodies as within all things,
as the intrinsic principle of all.

We bow to you, resplendent Indweller Vasudeva! the seed of all that is!
You stand changeless, unsullied.

The Supreme stage is your core, the Universe your shape.
You are the unborn, Eternal (Vishnu Purana 3.17. 14-34).[2]

The Hindus believe that the human being, through the power of his ever-adaptive mind, can become whatever he incessantly thinks of and worships. In the *Bhagavad Gita* Krishna says: "Those who worship the gods become gods; those who worship ancestors become ancestors, those who worship the elements master the elements, and those who worship Me gain Me (IX, 25)." In other words, love for the highest brings the highest fruit. Following this line, the *Bhagavata Purana* declares that to be freed of all desire and to obtain the knowledge of the ultimate truth, one must worship Para Purusha, the Supreme Person (2.3, 1-10).[3] Atop Doladri Hill, this Supreme Person is present as Changu Narayana, the manifest form of the Immensity, that divine essence which dwells in all. Worship of Him is worship of the highest form and leads

to the awareness in which "the Immense Presence is perceived in all things (*Mahanirvana Tantra*)."

The ritual pattern at the temple embraces each of the deities there and also honors those not present at the temple who, in Nepal, are honored on certain days. The temple rituals acknowledge the many annual festivals of the Valley, whether they be in honor of Narayana, or another deity such as the local Bhimsen.[4] This, as we have seen, is only logical, as Vishnu is *that elemental shape from which the gods and all living beings have sprung (Vishnu Purana* 3.17). To worship another god is to worship not one, but many aspects of the Para Purusha.

The ritual at Changu Narayan can be divided into three kinds, as listed in the scriptures: *nitya—daily* rites; *naimittika—rites* offered on special occasions; and *kamya—rites* done for the attainment of special aims. These are further broken into Vedic ("right hand," traditional) or Tantric ("left hand"). According to the resident *brahmin*, the worship of Changu Narayana is of the "right-hand" way. The worship of Chinnamasta, however, is of the "left hand" way. For this reason, there is a Tantric priest who lives in the temple compound and performs the Chinnamasta-*puja* . In Nepal, only minor differences are seen between the two ways. Perhaps this attitude is reflective of these words of Krishna, "My worship is of three kinds, Vedic, Tantric, and mixed. A man should worship me in whichever of these three ways he *prefers* (*Bhagavata Purana* 11.27.7) [my italics]."[5]

Before discussing the various rituals we will look at the sociological and religious functions of temple priests and caretakers whose *dharma* is to watch over the Lord's home, to see that the rituals are performed properly. Their duties are described as follows.

The bhandels: The caretakers of the Changu Narayan complex are called *bhandels*. They are responsible for cleaning the shrines, assisting the priest to prepare offerings and fetching the water for the bathing of the deity.

There are many families of *bhandels* and they alternate every month. With the exception of certain festival days, the *bhandel* in charge is bound by temple law to remain within the area of the temple; he cannot cross over the Manohara river at the bottom of the hill. Should he ever have to do so, in some dire situation, religious law requires that, before leaving the complex, he shave his head, cut his finger nails, and wear white dress. For the month that the *bhandel* is in charge, his sole duty is to care for the needs of the temple and

to look after the deity's sacred home. He is not to become impure (*ashuddha*) by leaving the ritual space.

Once every month on *dwadashi*, the twelfth day of the bright half of the moon, the *bhandel* is ritually changed. On that day the new bhandel receives all of Narayana's jewelry from the former *bhandel* in the presence of the Changu Narayana priest, the chief of the *bhandels*, and five elected members of the local community. By handing over the God's sacred belongings, the *bhandel* also hands over the power to care for the God and the purity to be a servant in the Lord's temple.

The brahmins: An incident in the year 1695 illustrates the importance of the priest in the functioning of the temple. In that year, the father of the Changu Narayana priest died. By scriptural law the son was bound to perform the *kriya* ceremony which included living in one room and wearing only certain clothes for thirteen days. Such a ceremony would have made it impossible for him to watch over the temple. He traveled to the Royal Palace and asked for a temporary replacement. From his request arose a big meeting. It was decided that the priest's function was too important. He was to continue to tend to the temple while one of his brothers mourned for his father. Today this arrangement is still in effect for death as well as special birth impurity ceremonies, known as *sutaka* rites.

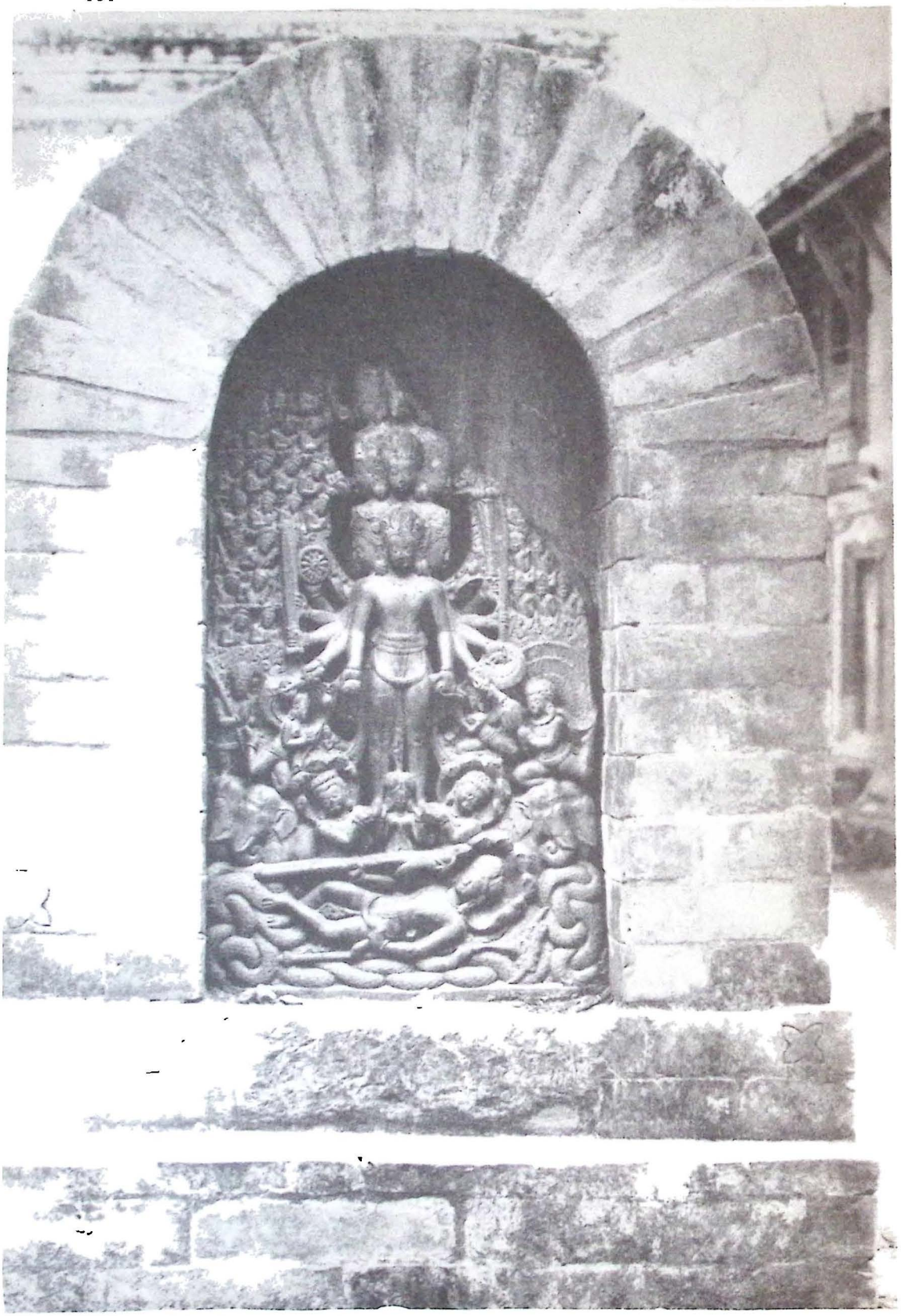
The priest is invested with the *dharma* of worshiping the sacred image. This worship sanctifies the earthen form making it fit to house the Supreme Spirit which can then manifest Itself to those who come to the temple. There is a separate *brahmin* priest for each of the shrines at the complex. Of these the priest of Changu Narayana is the highest. He is the chief priest and as such takes up residence within the outer walls of the temple complex in a room directly west of the God's shrine.[6] The current priest belongs to the lineage of the Subedi-thar clan. It is believed that this family has carried out the priestly worship at the temple since its origin, which means for at least twenty-seven generations. The priest today claims that he is a direct descendent of the *brahmin* who beheaded Vishnu. Needless to say, therefore, the rituals which he performs are truly a family tradition - done by those of his blood for close to two thousand years.

NITYA PUJA

The act of *puja* is filled with symbolic meaning. Every element used in the ritual, every gesture performed by the priest, in some way replicates or calls

5th century Garuda

11th century image of Narasinha avatar



7th-8th century statue of Vishvarupa-darshana

upon the cosmic life processes. The element of the Beheaded adds great richness and much to consider when discussing the *nitya* rites at Changu Narayan. Every morning, shortly after dawn, the jewelry and metal seat of Changu Narayana are taken outside and cleaned by the *bhandels*. This act does not simply ensure that the God's metals will always be sparkling. It is a way of worshiping the divine attributes of the God which these ornaments represent. The shining gold and silver jewelry are symbols of His immortality, His freedom from strife, and undying strength.[7]

After the ornaments have been cleansed, the priest, after bathing himself, enters the sanctum to bathe Narayana. He carries with him a vessel of water fetched by the *bhandels* from the *dhara* (water fountain) below the temple.[8] Water has obvious associations with purity. Bathing removes not only dirt, but inner impurities, leaving the devotee and image ritually pure. Further, since water covers the earth in its many forms as streams, rivers, lakes, oceans, and rain from the heavens, it is seen as the element pervading all life. Water, like Vishnu, is analogous with pervasiveness. Therefore, "the bathing of the image symbolizes the perception of *chit* (consciousness) and *ananda* (joy) pervading the world."[9]

Before bathing the image, the priest performs a ritual which makes the *nitya* rite at Changu Narayan unique in the Hindu world.[10] He removes Vishnu's golden head. From here the worship continues of the Beheaded form. While the priest says that this is done to show how the God first appeared after the *brahmin* beheaded him,[11] I offer here a more symbolic interpretation as given in the scriptures.

As discussed earlier, the Beheaded form is equated with the sacrifice. In the *Satapatha-Brahmana*, Narayana, seeking to become the All, performs the *Purushamedha* (sacrifice of the Cosmic Man).[12] Through His own ritual dismemberment, as illustrated in the "Purusha-sukta", Narayana became the transcendent, supreme Godhead. With all His parts severed, it is from His head that the *brahmin*, the highest caste, arose. The *brahmins* serve as the link between man and God, as channels of divine knowledge. As the root of their caste name suggests, the *brahmins* are related to the *Brahman*.

The symbolism of the severed head is carried further in the tale of sleeping Vishnu's beheading by His own bow. When His head falls it becomes the sun, the source of light which makes life possible. Solar radiation (*pravargya*) is considered a constant offering. The sun continually gives its own life to make our life possible. This giving is said to be possible through a perpetual

beheading of the sun and as such, the Beheaded represents (the sun's) life-giving and life-destroying power. In the *Dhyana Shloka* Vishnu is worshiped as "residing in the orb of the sun" and is praised as Surya Narayana. His head having become the sun, this verse suggests that Vishnu now resides in the sun in His entirety.

With these references we can see in the priest's ritual beheading of Changu Narayana a re-enactment of the *Purushamedha*, that cosmic sacrifice which at once raises Narayana to the level of the Supreme Being, while filling the cosmos with His being. It is also, perhaps, a worship of the sun, beheading Narayana so that His head might become the "yonder sun" (*Satapatha-Brahmana* XIV). It is important to note that this morning ritual is performed at sunrise, a time when millions of Hindus are repeating the sacred *Gayatri mantra* to aid Surya Narayana in His journey across the heavens. Whether consciously known or not, the priest may also be taking part in this ritual in a rather different, but symbolically significant way.[13]

In this light, the removal of the head is the point at which Changu Narayana becomes the most powerful. It is the supreme moment when His being is filled with divine fire (*tapas*) and burned in the spiritual flames of ritual. The bathing which the priest then offers thus seems at once to purify and to cool the overheated Lord whose very essence has been sacrificed to become the All. The priest first bathes Him with water, then milk and then *panchamrita* (the five nectars)—a mixture of milk yoghurt, sugar, butter, and honey which since Vedic times has been offered to the gods. The bathing finished, the priest repeats a special *mantra* and re-joins the head to the body. This act, known as the *shiro-sandhana*,[14] is, in the words of Danielou (p. 281), "the consummation of the cycle, the ultimate resurrection of all forms, without which the meaning of the sacrifice would remain incomplete." In this, we see the theme of the dying and resurrected Lord, ritually slain that He might rise to His supreme state as Para Vishnu. His life is taken away to be renewed each day.

Here we return to the myth of Narayana's beheading by the unknowing *brahmin*. After slaying the demonic form which emanated from the tree, the *brahmin* saw Vishnu arise from the body and proclaim that He was freed of His curse and that He would remain on Doladri to be worshipped.[15] The demonic form might be seen as impurities which the *brahmin* removed through beheading. Each day this process is re-enacted, in conjunction with the purifying element of bathing, keeping Narayana perpetually free of all

curses, all impurities, and thereby empowering Him to satisfy His desire to become the All.[16]

After the *shiro-sandhana*, sandalwood paste is applied to the head and body of the deity. While doing this, members of the *kusles-jati* (musician caste) perform in the courtyard to please Narayana. Such actions, like much of the *puja* , can be traced back to the basic Hindu conception of the deity as a king or queen.[17] As a royal personage, Vishnu enjoys bathing and music.

In addition to this bathing, Vishnu is offered a number of ritual objects. Flowers are placed on Him as a symbol of the element of ether. Incense is burned invoking the element of air. Lights are waved to call forth the essence of fire. *Mantras* of praise are sung to invoke sound, and rice is offered as a symbol of "the perception of *Sat-chit-ananda* (experience-consciousness-bliss) in all elements."[18] Vishnu is then fed sweet foods and afterwards a clove mouthwash. With the offering of food, whose elemental nature is earth, each of the five elements—earth, water, fire, air, and ether—have been offered to the God. The cosmos has been ritually recreated and offered to Him from Whom it originally arose. In this way the world is, through ritual, made as an offering to God and thereby sanctified. The act of *puja* is one of purification on many levels. The image itself is purified and made fit for the Supreme Spirit to dwell in. The priest, as he sanctifies the sacred image and space, himself enters that purity which will later affect the devotee who comes for *darshan*.

After the sanctification of the central image, the priest then comes back out of the temple, leaving the sacred space, to worship each of the smaller shrines with the water used to bathe Narayana. In this way the entire complex is made pure. This ritual finished he performs *pradakshina* (circumambulation) three times around the central shrine. In this rite which combines bodily movement and prayer, the priest pays homage to his Lord and, in conjunction with each round, asks for the blessings of past, present, and, future. Completing his final round the priest worships the doorway to the main image and then offers whatever water is left to Garuda, who, at Changu Narayan, is always the first of the Lord's devotees to receive His *prasad* (grace).[19]

At the very end of the *nitya puja* , a special necklace, the *Satya Naga*, is placed on Narayana. Shaped like a cobra, this sacred ornament is believed to be the serpent Shesha. When it is placed on the Lord's neck, when Vishnu is

symbolically united with His animal counterpart, the morning *puja* is complete and the universe has been ritually restored to wholeness.

Now, this wholeness is to be offered to the devotees who will come to pay homage to their God. They will come to see His beautiful and powerful form and to receive the water, foods, and flowers used in the morning ritual as offerings of His *prasad*. If the main doors have been closed when the devotee comes, the bhandel will open them so that the devotee may step into the threshold and have the sight of Narayana. In this highly significant moment the devotee not only sees the Lord, but the Lord sees him. In this way blessings are transmitted. The devotee then makes an offering to the God and in return receives an offering. With hands folded the devotee bows, and then circumambulates before leaving the temple complex. He returns to the world purified by the sacred space of the temple.

After sunset the priest again enters the temple to offer *arati* (waving of the lights) to the deity. At this time, many of the same rites are enacted as in the morning (including the playing of music) and there is no need to elaborate further . It is, however, relevant to note that the ritual pattern follows the course of the sun, worshiping at its rising and setting. The *arati* is also a way of saying good-night to the image, who, like a king, will sleep , to be awakened by the next morning's ritual. Perhaps most importantly, the ritual encapsulates the day, sealing it with sacredness, ending it by again partaking in the cosmic sacrifice which is life. *Arati* finished, the priest locks the temple doors and retires. In the morning he will arise and repeat the same pattern which is enacted every day of the year, ensuring that Changu Narayan will remain a sacred space, fit not only to house the Lord, but to be Him.

NAIMITTIKA PUJA

It is believed that some time ago a son sought to honor his deceased father by offering *khir* to Changu Narayana. In this vein, every Wednesday, nearly nine liters of *khir*, cooked in the home of the priest, is offered to Changu Narayana. No one but the priest is allowed to carry this food because it must be ritually pure for the Lord to eat. As the priest brings it from his home the *bhandel* walks ahead of him sweeping the path and sprinkling it with sanctified water to make sure that no impurities will contaminate the priest or the food. The priest alone enters the sacred sanctum to feed the deity. The

priest then offers the food to all the workers at the temple who receive it as *prasad* from the Lord.

People from all over the Valley will come to Changu Narayan to give this *khir* to their newborns on the special occasion known as the "Rice Feeding Ceremony," during which a baby is ceremonially offered his first grain. On this day, after the *khir* is offered to the visiting devotees, the bhandel locks the temple doors and stays in the courtyard with the key all day so others who come can receive *darshan*. From each person he charges five *pisa* (about one-fifth of a penny) which covers the cost of the panchamrita.

Festivals and Special Days of Worship

Nepal has rightfully been called the "Land of the Gods" for here there are, paraphrasing Perceval Landon, as many gods and as many temples as there are people.[20] As each god is a manifestation of the one *Brahman*, they are all worthy of veneration. This has led to Nepal's other worthy title as the "Land of Festivals," for in this diminutive country there are an average of two festivals a day, commemorated either on a national or local scale. The Nepalese are continually celebrating the lives of the divine beings whose lives correlate with their own. Many of these festivals are honored at Changu Narayan. Even though the special occasion might be a tribute to the god Indra or Brahma, the temple priest will partake in the festivities and pay special homage to Changu Narayana as a symbol of the One from which the many arise. A brief discussion of the annual festivals in Nepal provides a list of the *naimittika* rites observed at Changu Narayan.

Ekadashi: The eleventh day of every lunar fortnight is known as *ekadashi*. This is a day of special worship of Vishnu; a day said to be very dear to the God. Each *ekadashi* has a different name and story glorifying it. Agamic texts give iconographic descriptions of Vishnu for each different day. Of all these special days, three stand supreme. It is believed that Vishnu sleeps during the four summer months beginning on *Hari-shayana-ekadashi* (Vishnu's-lying-down-eleventh). At Changu Narayan and other Vishnu temples, this date is celebrated with special worship. Two months later, again on the *ekadashi*, it is believed that the Supreme Being rolls over. This cosmic movement is always celebrated. The most joyous of these days comes in the fall on *Haribodhini-ekadashi* (Vishnu's-awakening-eleventh) when the Lord arises from His slumber to care for His people. The following day is *Char-Narayana* (which

will be discussed shortly)] when thousands of devotees come for His *darshan* at His four (*char*) most sacred shrines.

Baishakha *(April-May):*

1) This month marks the beginning of the Nepalese year. On the thirteenth day of the dark half of the moon, in commemoration of the new year, the chariot festival of Changu Narayana begins, lasting for six days. At this time the symbolic forms (golden jewelery) of Chinnamasta, Kileshvar, Bhairava and Changu Narayana are placed on a small palanquin chariot carried by four people out to the surrounding villages.[21] Because the new year is dawning, this special ceremony is performed so that the gods may bless the king and his people by giving them *darshan*. As the chariots pass by neighboring houses, the people quit their work to make their prayers and offerings to the gods, to receive their grace for the upcoming year.

2) On the fifth day of the bright half of the moon the satin screen[22] which closes the entrance to the womb chamber is changed. This can be done only by the priest.

3) The seventh day of the bright half of the moon is the temple's *Bharsa Bandhara*, its "birthday"—the day many years ago when the temple's finishing touches were added and it stood complete as a sacred place of worship. Each year on this date the temple is inaugurated. The temple flags are lifted and and the shrines of Chinnamasta and Bhairava are offered duck and goat blood. The citrus family is worshiped for it has the power to bestow good health. A special *puja* and yajna is offered to Changu Narayana and all night the rows of candle holders surrounding the temple are kept filled and lit.

4) The twelfth day is the day the boar incarnation rescued the earth. To celebrate, Narayana's ornaments are carried to the nearby village of Sakhu and then brought back in time for *arati*. Those who carry it are selected from the village and receive a dinner of *khir* from the priest.

Jestha *(May-June)*:

1) On the sixth day of this month, Kumara, the war chief of the gods and older brother of Ganesha, is worshiped throughout Nepal. This day ceremonially marks the beginning of the rainy season. Since the Licchavi time, Kumara has been worshiped in association with both war and rain. The temple courtyard around Changu Narayana, including the nearby wells and fountains, is cleaned to welcome the long-awaited rain god, the bringer of life.

2) This month also marks the commencement of *Hari-shayana-ekadashi*, the beginning of Vishnu's long nap. A special *puja* at Changu Narayan will mark this day, and the community will then wait expectantly for the joyful time of His awakening.

Ashadha *(June-July)*:

1) On the eighth day of the bright half of the moon Changu Narayana is offered *champaka* flowers. As many as possible are collected from the surrounding forest and placed around the God so that He is covered from head to foot. The people from Bhaktapur offer the God six pots of yoghurt and milk. Necklaces of rudraksha beads are offered to Kileshvar and Changu Narayana while Chinnamasta receives a goat sacrifice. Three days later people from Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, and Patan come to plant the tulsi plant, sacred to Lord Vishnu and believed to be a manifestation of the God. Four months later the God will be offered 125,000 tulsi leaves.

2) In the Licchavi times the industrial demands for cotton were high. The people were encouraged to grow the crop and then offer it to Changu Narayana. On the twelfth day of the bright half of the moon, all ornaments are removed from the deity except those made of cotton. These are left on the God in remembrance of the time when this valuable cloth was offered to Him. On this occasion, the many candles which surround the temple, burn throughout the night.

Shravana *(July-August)*:

1) On Luto Day, the first day of the month, five clay bricks are placed in the courtyard. A rooster is sacrificed and then the bricks are thrown as far as possible, in the belief that the distance thrown is proportional to the amount of luck they will be given to stay free of the disease of *luto*.[23]

2) The fifth day is *Naga-panchami*, the day the snake is worshiped all over Nepal. It is believed that those who worship Kileshvar at Changu Narayan will attain salvation. The temple priest claims that on this day, because of his struggle with the serpent Takshaka, the massive Garuda statue perspires. The handkerchief which the priest uses annually to wipe Garuda's moistened brow, was, in years past, sent to the king at Kathmandu where it would be placed in water to create a remedy for snakebite.[24]

3) On the summer solstice (*Shravana-shukla-dvadasi*) of this month the *bhandels* visit Hanuman Dhoka bringing *prasad* from Changu Narayana in the

form of *champaka* flowers. Three days later, the three silver jars representing Vishnu, Lakshmi, and Saraswati are filled with sacred water and carried by the *bhandels* to Hanuman Dhoka. A local myth tells us that,

> Once there was a devout king who would visit Changu Narayana everyday from his palace in Kathmandu before even drinking a glass of water. One day the river Manohara was flooded and the king was unable to have his *darshan*. Filled with sadness the king returned home swearing not to eat until he could visit the temple. That night as the king slept Changu Narayana came to him. The Lord said that he was pleased with the king's devotion and that the king would no longer have to come to the temple. Instead He would come to the king and his children once a year. The next day the king awoke and sent a white horse to carry the deity back to the palace.[25]

Even today , a white horse is sent to Changu Narayana with three military officers who spend one night at the temple. The next day the *bhandels* carry the three jars and the officers return with the white horse. In Kathmandu, the three gods are received by a military band and batallion. Then they are paraded around the city and finally taken to Hanuman Chowk. Here a very significant event occurs. Kumari, the living goddess of Nepal, is brought to receive Narayana. Then she and the three jars are worshiped. This is a special rite whose origins are Tantric. Their meeting parallels, in the outer world, the great union of the god and goddess powers said to dwell within man. After the worship, the jars are taken to the Taleju temple of Hanuman Dhoka and are kept on a special throne. Here, the Changu Narayana priest performs *puja* and then the gods are carried to the Royal Palace courtyard to be worshiped by the king and his family. At the end of the day they are returned to their home atop Doladri Hill.

Also on this day a special *khir* of *karkala* leaves is offered. The *Gopal-raj vamshavali* says that in the ninth century there was a famine in Nepal and on this day Changu appeared in the dream of the temple priest and told him to offer this special *khir* the next morning. Shortly afterwards the famine ended.

4) The *ekadashi* of this month marks the moment of cosmic significance when the Lord rolls over, indicating that He is indeed only sleeping and will soon arise.

5. Beginning in August and lasting for one month, many orthodox Buddhists of Nepal come to the temple to worship Changu Narayana as Hari-Hari-vahana Lokeshvara. They also worship Kileshvar as Samantabadhra Lokeshvar, and Chinnamasta as Vajra Yogini. Many Buddhists come in

groups and offer both group and individual *puja* of the three deities. After each *puja* the priest offers them *prasad.*

Bhadra *(August-September):*

1) The eighth day of the dark half of this month is *Krishnastami,* the birthday of Krishna. All over Nepal , this beloved form of Vishnu is worshiped, especially at His shrine in Patan where even the king comes to pay homage. At Changu , salt, raw sugar, ginger and other spices are offered to the main deity, while the priests are fed a special *khir.*

2) The twelfth day of the bright half of the month is Indra-jatra, one of Nepal's longest and biggest festivals, marking the end of the monsoon season. During this time special homage is paid to Indra, the god of rain. At Changu Narayan a special pole ceremony is performed. Devotees come to dance around the pole and offer yoghurt and beaten rice to Vishnu.

Ashvina *(September-October):*

The first day of the bright half of the month heralds Nepal's supreme festival, *Dasain,* which seems a combination of Christmas, Halloween, New Year's, and Thanksgiving all in one. The nine days of this festival are known as the the *Navaratri* (the nine nights). During this sacred time the *Navadurga* (the nine forms of the goddess) are worshipped. The Chinnamasta temple at Changu Narayan contains each of the nine goddesses, and it is here that the Chinnamasta priests offers a special *puja* on each night of *Dasain.* Here, as all over Nepal, animals are sacrificed to appease the hunger of the goddess. At Changu alone hundreds of goats, chickens, and water buffalo are sacrificed.[26] Around Nepal the number is in the hundreds of thousands. As well as pleasing and honoring the goddess, *Dasain* marks the time of Lord Rama's battle with the demon Ravana. The final day is the day Rama triumphed; a day of celebrating the Lord's conquest over evil. On this day, for the last fifteen hundred years, a long pillar has been erected at Changu Narayan upon which a wick lamp is placed. This lamp is kept lit every day for one month so that good might always reign supreme.

Kartika *(October-November):*

The first *ekadashi* of this month, *Haribodhini-ekadashi,* is among the most joyous days of the year, for it marks the rising of Narayana from his long slumber. The following day is the *Char Narayana Jatra,* the pilgrimage of the

four Narayanas. On this day the Narayana faithful walk to each of the four temples built by Haridattavarma including Changu, Ichangu (Ishana), Shikhara, and Bishankhu (which replaces the now extinct Lokapalasvamin temple). This is a circuit of some forty-four miles, and according to inscriptions at Changu Narayan, it has been walked by the faithful every year for the last sixteen or seventeen hundred years. Special offerings are sent from the Royal Palace to Changu Narayan where a vast supply of water is kept for the thirsty pilgrims.

Marga *(November-December)*:

The twelfth day of the bright half of this month begins with a worship of Ganesha, the remover of obstacles. Then Bhairava, the wrathful form of Shiva, is worshiped and Chinnamasta is propitiated with the sacrifice of a buffalo, a goat, and a duck. During the day ceramic jars are brought to the temple. People from the artist caste (*chitrakar jati*) come and adorn the jars with various gods and goddesses. After painting the jars, they paint on the plinth of Changu Narayan. Later the *bhandels*, carrying ten jars of *panchamrita*, circumambulate the temple leading two cows. The priest then enters the sanctum, removes Narayana's head and pours the jars over the image. Then the cows are worshiped as forms of Lakshmi, and a special night *puja* is offered in the courtyard. The ceramic jars which had been painted earlier, are filled with water and used during the worship. The largest jar belongs to the king and is sent back to him afterwards. Throughout the night the temple is kept illumined.

Pausha *(December-January)*:

The winter solstice (*Pausha-shukla-purnima*) of this month calls forth the last major festival of the year. On this day Changu Narayana, Lakshmi, and Saraswati are again brought to Kathmandu in their silver vessels. They are first carried to the Royal Palace where the king can have their *darshan* and then on to Hanuman Dhoka where they are given a special *khir*. As the gods are carried to Kathmandu the people will emerge from their homes displaying their used pots, and when the beloved deities pass by the people smash them on the road. There is an interesting story which accounts for this peculiar behavior:

One day Changu Narayana decided that since this was the *Kali Yuga*, the Age of Darkness, He would retreat to the mountains to live as a yogi in silent meditation. First, He thought, He would inform the king of his intention. The priest knew of the God's desire and quickly travelled to the Royal Palace to forewarn the king. The king ordered that everyone break their old pots along the road from the temple. When Lord Vishnu came across the scattered pieces of potteries across the road, He was dissuaded from travelling because in Nepal such signs are considered a sure warning of bad luck. Thus He returned to the temple and has stayed there every year. Now, every time Narayana plans to tell the king of His intention, He finds the road to be covered with bad omens.[27]

KAMYA PUJA

Those rites which are done to attain specific aims or satisfy desires, are associated with the Tantric Chinnamasta shrine. These rites, which confer upon the worshiper special powers (*siddhis*), are inherently very secretive, only revealed to the initiate. The bronze doors of the Chinnamasta temple are almost never opened. I was able to interview the Chinnamasta priest but, characteristically, he revealed little of the nature of the *puja* he performs, except to affirm that it does, often, fall under the classification of *kamya*.[28] He also said that, like the Narayana priest, he uses a Vedic *mantra*. This suggest that, although Tantric, his *puja* falls under the classification of the Right Hand or Vedic way.

Unfortunately, these rudimentary comments are the best that can be made at this point. A deeper elaboration of the *kamya* rites awaits further research at the temple.

NOTES

1 "Lingopasana-rahasya," *Siddhanta*, II 1941-2. Translated by Alain Danielou in *Hindu Polytheism* (Bollingen Series: N. Y., 1964. p. 363).

2 *Ibid.*, Danielou. 368.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 372.

4 In India, Bhimsen (Bhimasena) is a deified war hero and one of the five Pandava brothers. But in Nepal, in an unexplained metamorphosis, he has become a god of

good fortune whose twin tasks relate to love and commerce. Revered by the *vaishya* caste, his shrines are most commonly found among Kathmandu's many bazaars.

5 *Op. cit.*, Danielou p. 382.

6 The surrounding walls, erected for the purpose of serving as a fort, are about 5 meters across and hollow inside leaving an adequate living space.

7 Outside of scriptural references and information given to me by Mukunda Aryal and the temple priest, this discussion of *nitya puja* is taken primarily from two sources: 1) *Op. cit.*, Danielou and 2) Gupta, Sanjukta. Hindu Tantrism.. Leiden/Kroln: E. J. Brill, 1979.

8 Often, temples will be built near a river or lake to have immediate access to this purifying element. At Changu Narayan, a natural source is not available, so a *dhara*, or water outlet, has been built below the temple in the village of Changu. Atop the stone *dhara* is sculpted an image of Garuda Narayana, allowing the bather to have *darshan* while scrubbing his/her toes.

9 Karapatri, "Sri Bhagavati tattva." *Siddhanta*, V. 1944-45.

10 After continuing research I have found no other Vishnu temple at which the central image is beheaded. For that matter, I know of no such temple of any Hindu deity. If I am wrong in my assumption that Changu Narayana and His *nitya puja* is unique in this respect, I would appreciate being informed (561 S. Pearl Denver, Co. 80209).

11 See interview in ch. VII.

12 This hymn has led to the speculation that thel ndo-Aryans, around the time of their migration into India, actually performed human sacrifice.

13 For further discussion of the beheading ritual see discussion in Kramrisch ,1975.

14 Professor Aryal informed me that *shiro-sandhana* commonly refers to rites of animal sacrifice, but that it is also effective in describing the *nitya puja* at Changu Narayan. Indeed, the temple priest considers the culmination of his morning ritual to be "the *shiro-sandhana.*"

15 Refer to Chapter III, "Hindu Myths" for complete myth.

16 Would that I surpassed all beings! Would that I alone were this All!" Narayana says in the *Satapatha-Brahmana.*

17 See George Michell, *The Hindu Temple* (Harper & Row, New York 1977) for general discussion.

18 *Op. cit.*, Karapatri.

19 *Prasada* comes as both spiritual and physical blessings to the devotee. Food, water, flowers and other objects are *prasada* because they carry the Lord's grace.

20 Landon, Perceval. Ratna Pustak Bhandar.: Kathmandu, Nepal, 1987. p. 233.

21 Sixty years ago the gods were carried all the way to Kathmandu to see the king. Today, however, local interest and funding has waned.

22 In years past this curtain was gold silk.

23 This very common and painful disease, causes the joints of the hand to swell with puss and then scar over.

24 Slusser, Mary. *Nepal Mandala.* Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1982, p. 254.

25 See Anderson, Mary. *The Festivals of Nepal.* London: George Allen and Unwin, 1971; pp. 229-230.

26 After the animals have been sacrificed they are always eaten. The skins are used for a range of things from drum heads to clothing.

27 *Op. cit.*, Anderson, 229-230. Also summarized by Mukunda Aryal.

28 This interview is given at the end of Appendix B.

Conclusion

I have attempted to intertwine two components in writing this book: historical analysis and symbolic interpretation. Both are combined in an overall hermeneutical approach. The historical method is a more western means of access. It relies on facts, dates and evidence. Changu Narayan has proved to be an exciting arena for this type of analysis. Manadeva's inscription in 464 A. D. has been shown to have significant implication on Nepal's pre-history. Combined with evidence in the *Gopal-raj vamshavali* it appears evident that the Licchavi dynasty entered Nepal as early as the first century B. C. By pushing back the date of Licchavi rule, the origin date of Changu Narayan is significantly earlier. This has implications not only throughout Nepal, but all of Asia. The postulated date of the first or second century makes it the oldest pagoda in the world.

All of this is of great significance, yet, I sense, means little to the common Nepali. To him, the temple has a deeper symbolic meaning. It is this symbolic meaning which was the initial inspiration for writing this book. The historical significance came about as a natural by-product of an ancient structure. Most importantly, historical evidence illumines the temple's significance. It provides "proof" that the symbolism of the temple has great meaning to the Nepalese. Several times throughout its two-thousand year life-span Changu Narayan has been significantly damaged by Nature's grinding cycles. Each time it has been rebuilt.

The symbolic approach used in this book has attempted to discover why this temple has endured so long. It has asked, What does this temple mean to the people? Each day of contemplation makes clearer that this temple is the architectural form of the *Vishvarupa*. This message is embodied in multiple forms: in the symbolism of the Tree-Axis, of the Cosmic Mountain and Supreme Person. This book has focused more strongly on the third of these. The "Purusha-sukta" myth of Narayana's *purusha-medha* (human sacrifice) is the origin of this symbolism. Significantly, the central image at the temple is a headless form of Narayana. Exploring the symbolism of the beheaded adds further meaning to the *Vishvarupa* theme. Beheading releases the life energies. It brings forth the divine food of universal sustenance. Without sacrifice there can be no *Vishvarupa*. The universal form is sustained through sacrifice and the Beheaded is the supreme symbol of sacrifice.

In addition to the beheaded Changu Narayan and Chinnamasta images, there are also the amazing sculptures of the *Vishvarupa-darshana*, Vaikuntha, the *vyuhas* and *avatars*. Each of these illustrates the theme of the One in the Many, of the Lord Become All. When one examines the images of the temple, this theme comes through time and time again. Each sculpture illustrates in concrete form a theology of multiplicity within oneness. While seeing Krishna's *Vishvarupa*, Arjuna sees a myriad of forms, yet they are all contained within the Lord.

There are an immensity of forms at Changu Narayan, but they form a whole: structurally, aesthetically, and symbolically. The central shrine is the oldest structure in the complex. Around it throughout the ages have been built additional shrines and images. Yet, each addition of form only repeats the theme of the central structure which can be described as the Purusha, the Tree-Axis or the Cosmic Man. Either way, the message remains the same. This is the architectural form of the *Vishvarupa*, the Universal Form. In the *garbha-griha* lies the beheaded Vishnu. His beheading is the sacrifice which gives rise to all. From this central chamber the temple extends upwards and outwards. From the Lord's *para* aspect emanate his *vyuha* and *avatar* forms. These emanations appear upon the temple's struts as well as in the surrounding courtyard. In this way the temple reveals the process of cosmogony. In the beginning there is only the Supreme Being. Then, like a tree He extends out. From the axis of His being, emanates the cosmos. Fully extended, the Supreme Being assumes His *Vishvarupa*. Sacrifice brings forth food. Food leads to growth and growth brings forth the cosmos. All of these themes are found at Changu Narayan.

The temple groundplan of the *Vastu-purusha mandala* further clarifies this theme. Its eighty-one squares make up the body of the Cosmic Man. The equation is simple: *mandala*=the Purusha=the Totality=*Vishvarupa*=*Mandir*.

From all angles one is drawn to the conclusion that the temple symbolizes the One in the many. Many terms could be used. However, *Vishvarupa* seems most appropriate. *Vishvarupa* implies a creative act. It speaks of an extending out and a multiplying of forms. Architecturally and symbolically, the temple embodies all of these themes. To the Hindus and Buddhists alike this is a sacred site. Here, divinity is made manifest. The symbolism of the One is brought to life through a sculpted dance of myriad yet highly calculated forms.

* * * *

"Time is a great friend," the Indian sages have said. As this book comes to a conclusion the truth of this great statement seems ambiguous. This book has grown in size daily. New ideas and sources continually spring forth. Weaknesses seem painfully apparent; yet the implications of this study brings forth the potential of further and exciting research. In closing, a few suggestions for further research are made. Changu Narayan is but one example of the Nepalese style. The *Vishvarupa* motif should be tested in a comparative analysis with other Nepalese pagodas. The other Narayana temples built by Haridattavarma would be an interesting place to start.

Little research has been done on the symbolism of the Beheaded. The *Chinnamasta-Tantra* is untranslated. The *Satapatha-Brahmana* has been only sparingly studied. The beheaded imagery is a rare, but important theme in Hinduism. A better understanding of it would shed light on the Changu Nārāyan temple.

Finally, the key to this interpretation of the temple as the Vishvarupa Mandir, I now realize, is in the symbolism of the Tree-Axis. T. S. Maxwell aptly discusses this symbolism in terms of the sculpted form. The same motif applies to the Nepalese pagoda, more thoroughly and exactly than the cosmic mountain and Purusha themes. Although the Tree-Axis was suggested in this book, it was not developed fully. If time had permitted, it would have been. However, I leave this endeavor to the future.

As I write, Changu Narayan stands majestically atop Doladri Hill, twelve thousand miles away. A mere hundred pages have been used to encapsulate the *Vishvarupa*. A year of contemplation is now crystallized, but I am left with a lifetime of enquiry.

Appendices

APPENDIX A:
THE INSCRIPTIONS

Altogether three hundred and fifty seven inscription on stone, metal, and jewelery icons and ritual objects have been recorded at Changu Narayan, ranging from 464 A. D. to the present era. Many of these, done mostly on jewelery, are now in the central store of Hanuman Dhoka in Kathmandu where they are kept for safekeeping. Many others have been lost. As it is impossible to give a list of all the documents and their translations we have here given the gist of a few select beauties from each of Nepal's great historical eras.[1]

I. The pillar inscription of 464 A. D. :

"... long arms of lotus shine, the personification of joy, the master of all the three worlds, always active, Hari, the Vishnu residing on Doladri hill, worshiped by the Gods is the greatest of all. Victory to him.

"Manadeva was strong, full of patience and forgiveness, loved the people without hipocracy, always smiling and was first to express feelings, not proud but powerful, an expert of worldly affairs, a good friend of the poor and helpless, responsive to guests, destroyer of the enemy's pride, famous for his skills on both offensive and defensive weapons, having long and pretty golden arms—of bright golden complexion, broad shoulders, eyes like the lotus flower, Kamadeva (Cupid) in appearance and was desired by lovely women.

"He marched towards the east. The disloyal feudatories bent their head in surrender letting fall their festoons. The king re-established them as his vassals who became obedient to him. In a shape of a roaring lion the king now marched westward.

"The king fulfilled all his promises.....

"The King returned to his Kingdom after conquering Mallapuri and with happy heart gave inexhaustible wealth to the brahmin priests. He presented his mother a large amount of riches with much devotion."

II. Just below the central image of Changu Narayana there is a gold plated inscription from the seventh century A. D. which reads:

"Seeing the dilapidated condition of the golden dress and Garuda of Changu Narayana due to old age, the king Amshuvarman renovated them in the same style in the thirty-first year of his reign, the thirteenth day of the bright half of the month of Magha."

III. A simple inscription on bronze plated pedestal of Ganesha statue inside the Chinnamasta temple. The script, dating from the seventh century says:

"This image of Ganesha was offered by Prana Dhara Sharma."

IV. Inscribed in gold on the pedestal of a Ganesha image in the courtyard of Changu this inscription of 1176 A. D. reads:

"King Amrit Deva on the eighth day of the bright half of the moon of the month of Jestha (May-June) of the year 296 Nepal Era erected an image of Krishna[2] *wishing the heavenly abode to his departed brother Vijaya Deva."*

V. In the central chamber of the temple there is a pure gold inscription from the year 1387:

"The great king Jayastitha Malla is ruling the country carefully and religiously with the help of an able and qualified minister, Jayata Brahma... in this time of prosperity, the two brahmin (priest caste) brothers, Vishnudas and Gangadas by name, have offered to Vishnu a copper seat and special jeweleries to Lakshmi. By this work of the two brothers may all the creatures of the universe be happy and healthy. Let the rain fall in time and the earth be full of grains, the cows and brahmins be happy. May the king rule for a long time. The full moon day of the month of Margha, the Sunday of the week, every year on this day, the priest should worship the god according to this inscription."

VI. A gold necklace now in the collection at Hanuman Dhoka store from 1481, the time of King Yaksha Malla reads:

Golden jewelery from temple storeroom bearing 8th century inscription.

"Kirtising Bhara of Pata offered a special worship to Changu Narayans and offered this golden necklace to the God wishing a quick recovery from illness of his second son Kushamsing."

VII. A copper plated inscription from the storage room inside the temple on the second floor, dated at 1584 reads:

"In the reign of the two brother kings, Jayasingh Deva and Jayaranjitsingha Dev, Twako Bharo of Gokarna village along with his wife, Kapurmayi, offered two wooden struts to Changu Narayan along with 36 copper and brass utensils. By virtue of this the donor should get a place in heaven as long as the sun and moon shine."

VIII. Two bronze copies of the central image of Changu have the same inscription dating from 1659:

"In order to please Shri Garuda Narayana, Prtapamalla, the King of Kathmandu, offered these two sculptures of Jaya and Vijaya (gate keepers of Vishnu) in the year of 779 Nepal Era, Wednesday, the twelfth day of the bright half of the month of Phalgun."

IX. A square necklace of gold which is in the store room of Changu Narayan temple from 1680 A. D. reads:

"The wise and virtuous Bhagirama constructed a bridge across the river Khasyang-Khusung and offered this beautiful and expensive ornament to please Changu Narayana. Anybody who will destroy the bridge and ornament will receive all the wrath of Vishnu."

X. An inscription on the pedestal of the gold gilded statue of King Bhupalendra Malla and Queen Bhuvana Lakshmi dated 1704:

"Dressed in yellow garments, carrying shankha, cakra, gada, and padma in four arms surrounded by many gods, mounted upon Garuda, protect us O Lord Vishnu. Wishing salvation, reconstructing the temple of Narayana, Queen Bhuvana Lakshmi erected this beautiful golden statue of herself and her husband

Bhupalendra Malla after constructing the temple of Garuda Narayana and offering koti-homa (10 million sacrificial offerings to the ritual fire) and a golden pinnacle. After doing all these things this statue of the king and queen was erected."

XI. In the temple storeroom there is a silver plate from the year 1831 which reads:

"The prince Pratapa Singh collected all the old, useless utensils of Changu Narayan and added more silver and offered this to Changu Narayana totalling one hundred and forty three tola (fifteen hundred grams) in weight of silver."

XII. On a silver chain originally worn by the central deity now in collection at Hanuman Dhoka is this inscription from 1917:

"The crowned prince of Nepal offered this chain to Changu Narayana in the year 1917 its weight of 90 grams."

XIII. Three silver jars representing Changu Narayana and his two consorts, Lakshmi and Saraswati, are preserved in the sanctum of the temple. The Narayana jar, biggest of these, has this inscription:

"In the year 1959, the eighth day of the bright half of the moon of Pausha, on Wednesday His Majesty the King Mahendra Bira Bikram Sahadev and Her Majesty the Queen Ratna Raja Lakshmi Devi offered this jar of about 4000 grams of silver. Let this act be auspicious."[3]

From these inscriptions we can see that from the fifth century onwards Changu Narayan Mandir has been highly venerated and attracted many offerings. This great temple has both the oldest dated inscription, and a recorded history taking us from sixteen hundred years ago to the present. These inscriptions show the importance of the temple in the lives of the people throughout the ages. To those who make offerings, it is a living entiity. To take care of the temple and to offer it gifts is to receive the blessings of the God. In the two storerooms there are over 10,000 grams of silver and over 2,000 grams of gold plus a great many precious and semi-precious stones, all

offerings of devotion. The total monetary value will never be known, for the people of Nepal would never evaluate the property of their God. What is His is His.

On the one hand the temple has so much wealth, so many ornaments in the two storerooms, and yet the temple itself is in a poor and decaying condition. It is noble to hold the God's ornaments in safekeeping, yet might it not also please Him if a few were sold in order to maintain His home in a beautiful condition?

NOTES

1 All inscriptions taken from Mohan Khanal's *Changu Narayanka Aitasika Samargi (The Historical Documents of Changu Narayan)* [translated for author by Mukunda Raj Aryal].

2 The original image was of Krishna, not Ganesha.

3 The record ends here for during the reign of the present king the temple has not yet received inscriptional offerings, nor has it been renovated.

APPENDIX B:
THE WORDS OF THE PEOPLE

I visited the temple on two separate occasions for the purpose of interviewing the priest and devotees. I carefully wrote out a questionnaire which was approved by my advisor. However, as the interviews progressed, I found that to stick to these questions would have somehow hindered the potential of the moment. My questions seemed too intellectual and at times, too boring. The interviews often turned into intimate discussions. What began as formal inquiry would end as an intimate discussion of a person's faith. I found myself spontaneously asking questions, and I would continue to question as long as the person remained interested. The priceless answers they gave me, in a simple yet profound way, speak of the elements discussed in the previous pages.

A twelve year old village boy:

Q. Who is the greatest god?
A. Vishnu. But all the gods are equal.

Q. Who is your god?
A. Vishnu. But also Shiva. They are the same.

Q. Do you worship at the Changu Narayan temple?
A. Yes.

Q. You worship the statue?
A. Yes.

Q. Why?
A. Because Vishnu lives in it.

Q. Does He live only in the statue?
A. No.

Q. Where else does He live?

A. Many places.

Q. Does He live inside us?
A Yes.

The temple priest:

Q. Can you tell me how this temple came to be?

A. (Begins by telling myth of the *brahmin* who beheaded Vishnu)... the priest thought Vishnu might be a ghost. He appeared as a black child, he looked like smoke and he scared the priest. This was a very long time ago. I can't say how long ago. I'm not sure. After he cut the child Vishnu appeared. Vishnu said He would stay here, and so the temple was built.

Q. What you have said explains the origin of Vishnu. What about the other temples around the courtyard—the Chinnamasta, Kileshvar, and Bhairava shrines?

A. I will tell you about the Shiva (Kileshvar) shrine. Vishnu does not eat meat. The animals living on the hill wanted meat from the God but He could not offer them this. They became angry. They shook the hill. Vishnu prayed to Shiva who nailed (in the form of a *linga*) the hill and then he stayed to please Vishnu. Shiva can offer them meat. So can Chinnamasta.

Q. Some people say a statue is just a beautiful piece of stone. other people say it is more then that. Can you say something about this?

A. Oh, God lives in the statue. So, devotees come and pray—and the God hears.

Q. Is the God only in the temple statue?

A. Where the devotees pray the God comes there. We can see this with the Narasinha *avatar*. Prahlada prayed and the God came to save him.

Q. Does the God live inside of us?

A. Yes. (When) people come and pray at the temple they touch their head and heart[1] to show that the God is inside.

Q. The original statue was made without a head. Why was a head put on it?

A. After the priest had beheaded Vishnu, the God gave the priest a *mantra* to put his head back together and worship Him. This is why there is a head.

Q. Why is the head removed during the *puja* ?

A. The head is taken off because when Vishnu first appeared (to the priest) he had no head. At the end (of the *puja*) we say the *mantras* and put the head back on just as the priest did.

Q. Why is the Buddha said to be an *avatar*?

A. Buddhism is a branch of Hinduism. We accept (it). Same God only different name.

Q. What is *prasad*?

A. *Prasad* comes from the God. The water is holy after it is used to bath the God. We give it as *prasad*. Food and flowers are also *prasad*. Everything that comes from God is *prasad*.

Q. Why are there temples?

A. So people can worship the God.

Q. People can only worship at the temple?

A. No. (They) can worship at other places. They can worship at home. Wherever they pray—that is worship. The temple is very good, though. It the God's home. It is powerful.

Q. There are so many gods in Nepal. And at this temple to Vishnu there are also many gods. How do people look at them? Do they see them as different? or as parts of one God or...?

A. The gods are different, but they accept as the same.

Q. I have read in some scriptures that Vishnu is the One God...

A. Yes, this is true. They (the scriptures) say, "Everything is Vishnu. All the gods are Vishnu. We are also Vishnu."

Q. Do you believe this?

A. We believe. (Pointing to the statue of Vishvarupa) This statue shows us that the God is everywhere.

The second time I came to the temple for interviews I brought an interpreter. The monsoon season had begun. It was raining regularly and the morning we had planned to go was overcast. However, we chose to risk it and by the time we had arrived the clouds had completely cleared. When we arrived at the temple my interpreter looked up at the sky. He smiled and said, "The God is with us."

Twenty-six year old man from Kathmandu

Q. Why have you come from Kathmandu to be here?

A. It is my own wish. It wouldn't feel right if I didn't visit this temple. I had business near here, so I came.

Q. You come to worship the statue?

A. Yes. I consider it a living god. The whole statue is God.

Q. Do you offer things to the God?

A. Yes.

Q. Why?

A. I don't rationalize why I give. It feels joyful to give *puja* , and I think the God accepts.

Q. When you come to the temple and stand before the statue does God see you?

A. Yes. We see each other.

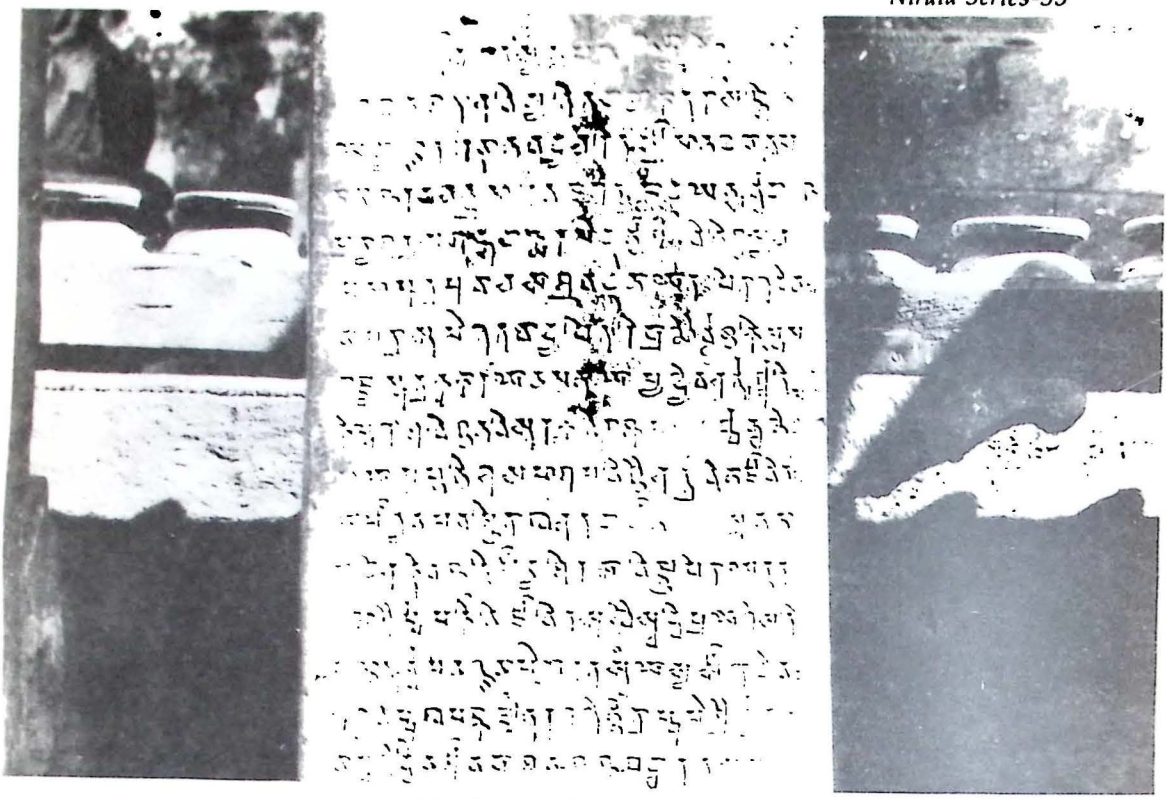
Q. What happens when you leave the temple?

A. Even though I leave the God behind, He still sees me. Wherever faith lies the God is.

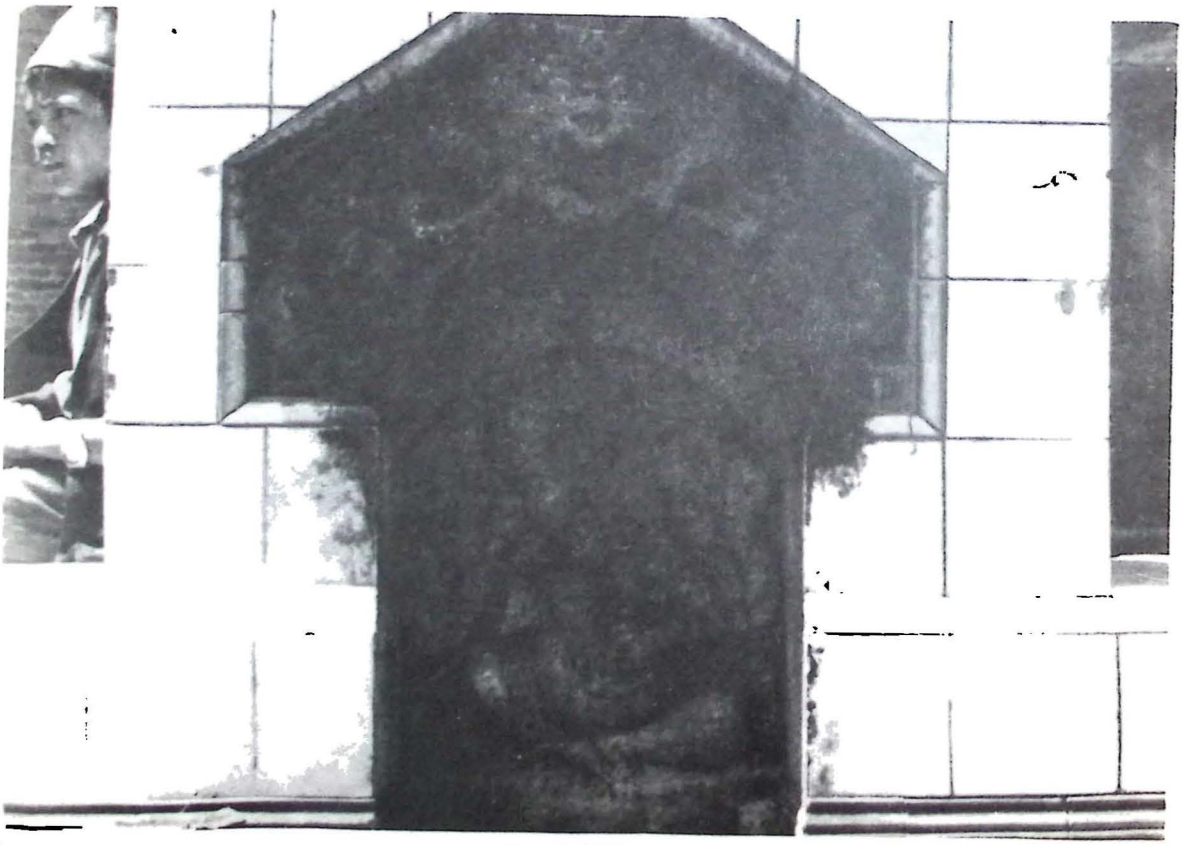
Q. (Pointing to his heart) Is the God in here?

A. Yes, the God is inside.

Shri Dhara vyuha *dating from the 7th century*



Detail of Manadeva Inscription



Ganesha Shrine

Seven-headed 19th century Vaikuntha Vishnu

NEPAL
RESEARCH CENT

Details of Shiva on lower struts

Q. There are so many gods. It is confusing to me. Can you explain?

A. All gods are in equal value, but because of tradition a few gods are more powerful.

Q. So the gods are different?

A. No, the gods are same. Only one god, but reflections are different.

Q. Why do you practice your religion?

A. Traditionally, religions have been there. Following religion brings me satisfaction.

A forty year-old local village lady

Q. How often do you come here?

A. I come every day. I come for *darshan*. I bow.

Q. Why do you bow to the statue?

A. He's (the God) alive. He sees me. (At this point an argument breaks out between her and a local village man, perhaps her husband, as to whether God exists. In apparent condescension she says to me, "I'm not sure if God exists." At these words another village lady (about sixty years of age) suddenly enters the conversation and the interview switches to her. (The interview begins with her response to the other women.)

A. God certainly does exist otherwise why would we be around Him?

Q. So, you believe God exists?

A. Without faith in Him how could you know yourself?

Q. What has your faith in God given you?

A. He (God) has given me everything.

Q. What has he done for you?

A. He sends me to perform different duties.

Q. How does He do this?

A. He speaks through my thoughts.

Q. He is inside of you?
A. If He wasn't in the heart how could he speak to me?

Q. Is there a difference between the God outside in the temple and the God inside?
A. God who has given us life should be offered something at the temple. God within should be treated well with good food and good life. The inner God feels happy when the outer god is worshiped.

Q. What do you hope to receive from your worship?
A. I have no desires. I worship to spend my life in happiness.

Q. What about after you die?
A. Whatever God wishes for my next life I have to accept. I just have to worship.

Q. What is a temple?
A. It is God's home.

Q. What are the different struts on the temple?
A. They are different illustrations of the God. They give *darshan* everyday.

Q. What is *darshan*?
A. I wouldn't eat without having *darshan*. That's how I was taught.

Q. Who taught you?
A. God teaches me to do whatever He teaches me to do. I see the temple in my dreams, but the God doesn't speak. God of old days used to speak. Now He doesn't speak. Well, He does speak sometimes.

Q. Are you and I God?
A. Yes, we're the God, too. We are part of Him.

A thirty-five year old pilgrim, three days journey from his village
Q. Why have you travelled so far?
A. For *darshan*.

Q. Why?
A. I feel very light after *darshan*.

Q. Do you receive something from *darshan*?
A. It is up to God whether He will give or not. Every time I come I feel I go one step further up in my life.

Q. Up towards what?
A. Towards happiness. It brings more happiness.

Q. What do you want most in your life?
A. To have the *darshan* of God.

Q. When you go for *darshan* the priest offers you something?
A. Yes, *prasad*. It is a blessing from *Bhagavan*. When I place it on my head it feels like *Bhagavan* has resided on my head.

Q. Can you receive *darshan* and *prasad* only at the temple?
A. If I think of God and repeat His name then I have God's *darshan*. When you think of His name you don't get *prasad* (flowers, water, etc.) but when you come to the statue you also get *prasad*.

Q. Why do you practice your faith?
A. Because it washes away all sins and maybe secures a position in heaven. No one can say.

Q. Do you come only for the *darshan* of Changu Narayana? What about these other gods in the courtyard?
A. There are many gods. The names are different but *Bhagavan* is one. I have the *darshan* of all the statues. They are the one God.

Q. Is *Bhagavan* inside of us?
A. He is inside.

Q. How is the God inside related to the God outside?

A. They are different. The God in the temple can be seen, but not the inner (God). No one can see the inner God. You know the inner God exists because he helps your mind and body operate.

Tantric Priest of Chinnamasta Temple

Q. I have heard that this is a Tantric shrine. What does that mean?

A. The *puja* at this shrine is special and different from other types of *puja*. I use a Vedic *mantra*.

Q. How is it different from the *puja* done to Changu Narayana?

A. One not only needs to read the *mantras*, one also has to perform certain rituals and master them to become Tantra. The people come and pay to have the *puja* done, including Westerners. This temple (Chinnamasta) is one of the most powerful Tantric temples in Nepal. So even the foreigners come.

The *puja* to Narayana is more ancient, the *mantras* are different Tantric *puja* is more violent, animals are sacrificed. It (the Tantric *puja*) guides powers. The Narayana *puja* seeks to fulfill desires whether it be in securing place in heaven or a happy life. The Tantric *puja* can also do this. Their basic aim is the same. Their form is different. The Tantric *puja* gives special powers, though.

Q. What do the people want from receiving these special powers?

A. People come with different reasons. Some come for wealth, others come to hurt enemies, others for freedom from the pain of this life.

Q. Is the *puja* effective?

A. One has to have faith and it works. One has to perform it and it certainly works—once it is done well.

Q. Do Tantric *sadhikas* come to the temple?[2]

A. Very few come. These people go to places like the graveyards to perform rites. Mostly, the people come, who don't know how to perform the rites.

NOTES

1 The Nepali word *mun* means "soul" and is understood to be both the heart and mind.

2 A *sadhika* is one who has been initiated by a guru into the *sadhana,* the spiritual practices of Tantra.

APPENDIX C:
GARDEN OF THE GODS

I am walking for the first time up the steep incline of Doladri Hill. The temple's gilded pinnacle is only a few hundred feet ahead. The path is leading through a traditional Newari village. The people and animals observe me with equal curiosity. I have come to study the temple, yet it is I who is being carefully noted. A few steps further and Mukunda tells me to turn left through the front door of one of these beautiful homes. Ducking, so as not to bump my head on the typically low entrance way, I hurry through the ground floor, home of various animals and their droppings, and into someone's garden. A few steps further and I am at the edge of the hill. The Valley in all its beauty stretches out before me. Scanning this magnificent view my eyes wander to the left and fall upon an even more wondrous sight—a pantheon of Hindu gods.

Sculpted in stone in the seventeenth century, these divine beings (about twenty in number) lie nestled in the bushes no longer enshrined in the temple of which they were once residents. What is their origin? There are two popular answers; one, a theory and the second a legend..[1] According to theory, in 1670 Changu Narayan was destroyed by fire.[2] In order to provide a place of worship for the central image of Narayana, which was not damaged by the flames, a temporary temple was built below the present site. After the original complex was renovated, this site was apparently ignored and left to ruin.

The legend tells us that:

> The king of Patan once took a mistress of a lower caste. Although she was a devotee of Lord Vishnu, due to her social standing, she was unable to worship His most sacred form as Changu Narayana. In response to her distress, the king built her a duplicate. After her death, the temple having served its purpose, began its gradual return to the earth.

Today, the foundation of this temple just barely protrudes from the earth. Although many of the images have been carried away in the arms of thieves, those that remain add a surreal, mystical quality to the ancient site. A visit to Changu Narayan is somehow incomplete without their *darshan*, without a visit to this garden of the gods.

NOTES

1 Told to me by Mukunda Aryal.

2 The inscriptional records prove that there was a fire in the late 17th century. However, there is no mention of the building of a temporary site.site

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COLOR PHOTO DESCRIPTION

Page 17 : Central shrine of the beheaded Narayana.
Page 18 : Detail of wood carving on Changu Narayan wall, showing an abundance of gods and divine ornamentation.
Page 19 : Shiva as corner struts.
Page 20 : (a) Bronze, intricately crafted temple doors: gateway to the sanctum.
(b) Torana with naga-consuming Garuda at the apex; At center is Vishnu flanked by Garuda at right and Lakshmi at left.
Page 53 : Vishnu's emblems barely visible at far left and right of photo; mirrors and photos amongst struts; smaller of temple's two iron bells at lower left; womb chamber sealed behind temple doors.
Page 54 : Garuda wreathed with Takshaka serpent.
Page 55 : Kileshvar shrine.
Page 56 : (a) Temple courtyard;
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(b) One of the five Panchayana deities found at Changu Narayan; Kileshvar Mahadev shrine.
Page 88 : (Clockwise) (a) Tree -like form of Nyatapola temple in Bhaktapur.
(b) Details from a Nepali manuscript (approximately four-hundred years old), showing the Vastupurusha-mandala.
(c) Chinnamasta shrine.
Page 90-91 : Devotees in the temple courtyard on a festivals day
Page 92 : Tantric image of Bhairav from the 17th century.

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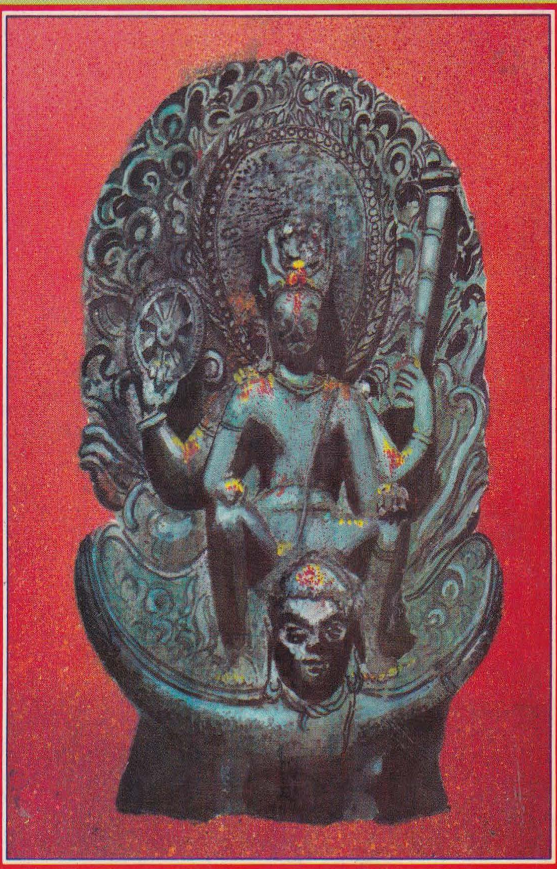

"In the *garbha-griha* lies the beheaded Vishnu. His beheading is the sacrifice which gives rise to all. From this central chamber the temple extends upwards and outwards. From the Lord's *para* aspect emanate his *vyuha* and *avatar* forms. These emanations appear upon the temple's struts as well as in the surrounding courtyard. In this way the temple reveals the process of cosmogony. In the beginning there is only the Supreme Being. Then, like a tree he extends out. From the axis of His being, emanates the cosmos. Fully extended, the Supreme Being assumes His *Vishvarupa*. Sacrifice brings forth food. Food leads to growth and growth brings forth the [illegible]"

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